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MIDDLE GREYNESS

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BY

A. J. DAWSON

AUTHOR OF "MERE SENTIMENT"

L.C.

JOHN LANE: THE BODLEY HEAD

LONDON AND NEW YORK

1897

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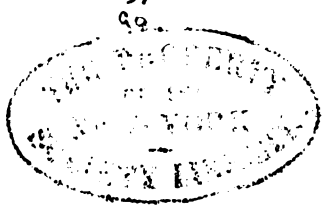

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Preface

At the birth, and in the writing, of this book, the author called it "The Beachcomber." Then he found that some years ago a very similar title to this had appealed to and been used by another author. In putting forward the story under its present title, the writer would ask his readers to remember that when Horatio spoke half incredulously of the "strange" nature of a certain moving tale, Hamlet replied to him, saying: "And therefore, as a stranger, give it welcome."

A. J. DAWSON.

London, *January, 1897.*

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MIDDLE GREYNESS

Part I

CHAPTER I

SOME SATIRES OF THE BUSH

THE moonlight away down South is very beautiful. Perhaps its nights are to many men one of the chief charms of life in the South. It is the same that lovers admire and burglars execrate here in England; but the moon in the Southern tropics and in all parts of Australia seems so much nearer, softer, and yet more brilliant than in the North. In the nights down there, a light comes which fills the air and soaks through one's very soul, soothing one's mind with thoughts of romance, visions of fair women, dreams of love more pure and noble than that of every-day life, and a feeling of serene pity for all beneath the sky that suffer. When one is breathing the atmosphere of nights such as these, few combinations which may enter one's mind seem unlikely of attainment; nothing imaginable appears impossible, and an ordinary splintery grey post-and-rail fence is an object of beauty and picturesqueness for the eye to rest upon.

Middle Greyness

But in the Bush, this all-pervading light is weird and very, very sad.

Towards the end of a long summer — it was early in April — the moon happened to be almost at its full one night, when two men were walking their horses along the track that leads round the foot of the Warroo range from the Narrabri coach-road. To be sure this track passes a boundary-rider's humpy at the foot of the first hill which marks the end of the Warroo run; but where it leads to afterwards, it would be hard to say. The boundary-riders know it as far west as the White Ridge; but after that it dwindles into a sheep track, then a brumby track, and then — well, one cannot say where the brumbies go.

The moon was full, and its light in that place both weird and beautiful. The two men were talking about it in a disjointed way, and had been doing so for some time. The timber there is mostly blue-gum and black-butt, and a lot of it is ring-barked. So in the moonlight, the trunks and limbs of the trees are ashen-grey and white in parts; and long strips of dead bark hang from them, and rustle in the night air. One of the men had called his friend's attention to this three times within half an hour.

Gum-trees do not spread out in a friendly way near the earth. Their trunks rise bare and uncompromising for a hundred feet or so, and from thence scraggy arms stretch out hooked fingers hungrily toward heaven, as though reaching after pity for their loneli-

ness. The effect is ghostly to a degree which one feels but cannot explain. One cannot, but both the men riding along the track to Warroo Hills were persevering in their attempts.

Now, when under such circumstances, a big grey wallaby flops across the track in two hops, twelve yards in front of one's horse's head, and at the same moment a jackass, out of sight in a tree overhead, bursts into a long cackle of cynical laughter; a man is apt to feel that the universe is sneering at his insignificance. When it happened so on this particular night, one of the two riders remarked that it was the weirdest thing he had ever known.

Then the other man, the bigger of the two, who rode a grey filly, and had a way of allowing his pipe to go out every few minutes, — swore. He was angry; but the oath he swore was not a very dreadful one. What he said was equivalent to: —

"Oh, hang the weirdness of it; when are we coming to the road?"

Seeing that the tall man, and probably the other man, too, wanted to find the coach-road, it was unfortunate that they should be riding towards the War roo Hills and the interior, on a track which leads through endless Bush to nowhere in particular. Perhaps, however, as they were not aware of the fact, and no one else in the world cared very much where they went, it was not of vast importance.

Just as the tall man shivered and struck a match to light his pipe after the effort of his last remark, the

grey filly shied and cleared four yards in a jump sideways. Her rider would probably have sworn again, but that relief was denied him by the suddenness of a shock which caused him to almost swallow his short briar pipe. The shorter man, whose attention was naturally not so confined to the eccentricities of the grey filly as was that of his friend, had time to notice what caused the animal's sudden activity.

By the side of the track, and showing pale yellow in the moonlight, he saw the smooth cut end of an iron-bark log — one half of a freshly felled tree. That in itself would make some horses shy, but lying in the coarse grass against the end of this log, was something white which did not belong to the Bush, and which, though simple enough in itself, surprised the short man almost as much as it had startled the grey filly.

"By Gad, it's a calf-bound book, and open at the titlepage," said he, as looking between his horse's ears in the soft moonlight he read, first in ink, the initials "H. M. D." and then, in ordinary type, the words, "L'Espadon Satirique, Par Fourquereaux."

When the tall man had gathered himself together and cleared his throat, with a sound which seemed to travel all round the Warroo Hills, the two dismounted and examined the book. Its subject struck them as being ironically appropriate to the situation, though the presence of such a book in those surroundings was incongruous enough to be startling. What pleased the wayfarers, however, was that their find suggested

the presence of a man. Now one is generally glad to meet a man in the Bush at night; and these two had begun to realise that their knowledge of their whereabouts was vague.

Neither spoke of the fact; but the shorter man tucked the book under one arm, whilst holding his horse's bridle on the other, and, as the two stepped out on the track between the gum-trees, he said quietly:

"I guess we 'll do a prospect for the owner of this work of satire."

CHAPTER II

BEACHCOMBER OR — WHAT?

WHEN the two men left the spot where the book had lain, the silence of the Bush was unbroken even by the rustle of dead bark; and so it happened that they distinctly heard footsteps on the track ahead, for at least a minute before they saw the figure of a man approaching them in the moonlight.

It is a curious thing, this meeting with a strange life in the midst of the death of a Bush night; almost as strange as it is to pass in the middle of the night, close to a lighted vessel with passengers on her decks, in some such over-the-edge-of-the-world spot as the Straits of Magellan, where the silvery glaciers of Tierra del Fuego run right down into the black water.

When the man was within twenty or thirty yards, he called out, "Hullo there, strangers!" and the effect produced by his voice in the sad loneliness of that place, was as much of a shock as would be a street boy's whistle in the central aisle of some stately cathedral.

He was a tall, finely-built man, with an old-looking head and iron-grey beard, and a body which seemed

that of a young man. He wore knee-boots and the Crimea shirt, mole-skins, and broad felt hat of the Bush. His shirt was open at the neck, and in one hand he carried a short clay pipe.

"We are a bit fogged, and should be glad of your assistance," said the taller of the travellers. "We were directed to take a short cut from where the main road crosses Warroo creek, through the Bush to where it skirts Black-butt Gully within five miles of Narrabri."

The bushman, whose voice and body seemed twenty years younger than his head, smiled. "That," he said, with a sidelong glance at the book in the short man's hand, "is, of course, the only beauty of short cuts. They take a man so much farther than a mere main road. I suppose this one's taken you about eleven miles further into Australia than you'd have gone by sticking to the highway."

The short man laughed; but his friend looked rather annoyed. He struck a match to light his pipe again, and said, "But how much farther is it on this track to the Narrabri road?"

"That way," said the bushman, pointing with his pipe-stem over the travellers' shoulders, "it's about five miles. This way" — the bushman inclined his shaggy head in the direction in which the men had been riding — "I should say roughly it was about twenty-five thousand miles as the crow flies. Is that my Fourquereaux, you've got there?"

The short man stretched out his hand, and the

bushman took the calf-bound book at which the grey filly had shied.

"Thanks! My humpy's just across the gully there. You'd better come and camp for to-night. If you get off the track hereabouts, it's doubtful whether you'll ever use your return tickets to the old country. You have return tickets, have n't you? Watch that filly when you get down the gully, or she'll shy at the smoke of my fire. Steady! Curse it, keep the brute off me!"

So they slipped and stumbled among the dead undergrowth down the side of the gully, following the bushman, who, with his volume of satires in one hand, stepped out between the trees as one who knew every inch of the way before him. On the rising ground beyond the gully, they saw a thin column of smoke rising from the fire in front of the bushman's gunyah. Over the fire hung a large billy-can from a cross-bar resting on two forked sticks; and on an iron-bark log beside the fire, the moonlight glistened over a metal wash-hand basin, a pair of hobbles, a couple of axes, a towel, and various odds and ends such as always collect outside a humpy in the Bush.

"Down, Satan, you brute!" said the proprietor of all this, as a big black kangaroo dog sprung onto the log and barked.

The bushman's residence was an ordinary humpy of stringy-bark, — four sheets at either side, with a strong ridge-pole on forked posts in the centre. But

it had the various little elaborations which come to a gunyah after a tenancy running into months, or perhaps years, and in point of size it was decidedly superior to the average one-man hut. In a few minutes the strangers' horses were unsaddled and hobbled out, and the men themselves were reclining on a pile of rugs placed at their disposal by the tenant of the gunyah, and partaking of the damper, tinned meat, and cheese, which he set before them with a matter-of-course hospitality somewhat surprising to guests fresh from old world conventionalities.

The tall man, his mouth full of damper and preserved mutton, was gazing with some interest at a little swing shelf full of books, amongst which he noticed well-thumbed volumes of Horace, Juvenal, Balzac, Rabelais, and Browning; when the bushman, addressing him, said: "You two are the first strangers that have been this way for eighteen months, and I suppose you have n't been half that time in the colony."

"Five weeks" were the words forced with some difficulty from the tall man's lips. And then he resumed his damper and mutton. He had eaten nothing since early morning. The bushman rose, and, taking a bottle of whiskey from a case that lay in one corner of the gunyah, proceeded to knock off its neck with the back of a knife.

"You 'll take some whiskey," he said, as he reached for two cups. "It 's better than the cheese. I can guarantee this as bottled fresh from Lethe,—

that is, I get it from the importers in Sydney, and not from the store in Warroo."

The owner of the swinging library placed the bottle before the two men, the shorter of whom made a mental note of the fact that their host took his whiskey by half-cups, neat. When the eating was over, the bushman assisted his guests to rig up a couple of bunks, taking four flour-sacks and the same number of thin saplings and forked sticks sunk in the ground, as his material. Then, with the whiskey and cups on the ground between them, the three men talked and smoked, whilst the moon, shining down between the tops of the tall trees and through the triangular front of the humpy, bathed the bushman's head and the end of his bunk in its pure white sheen, leaving the rest of the hut's interior in clean-cut black shadow.

The tall man took some papers from his saddle-bags, and, leaning forward into the light, read scraps of news of the old country he had left a few months before to the bushman, who talked of it as though it were part of a world in which he no longer existed. To the men fresh from England, the whole thing was strange and unreal. Perhaps the whiskey, "bottled fresh from Lethe," made their own lives seem far away, and the present phase grotesque and mystical. Perhaps the ghostly surroundings, and that indefinite ride between the bare trunks of the trees, made the reader of French satirists seem to his untravelled guests, a more mysterious dweller in the Bush than he

might otherwise have appeared. In talking of it afterwards, they were never very confident, but at the time, it seemed to the two men that whilst they lay stretched on flour-bag bunks, they listened to talk of all the countries and seas of which they had ever heard. That then, they took deep breaths and heard stories told in vivid nervous language, of men and women in lands they knew not of, who lived lives that were outside and beyond the lives of those who listened, as cities are beyond villages, and continents outside parishes.

Trying, six months afterwards and in another country, to convey to others the misty impression made upon the pair that night, the tall man said:

"When the sky across that little gully was getting full of streaks of silver and purple, the bushman was standing before the gunyah drinking whiskey from the neck of a bottle. Afterwards, when the jackasses in the trees outside were making the Warroo Hills echo back their sneering laughter, the bushman, his great grey beard trembling, and his eyes on fire, recited the whole of Browning's 'Fra Lippo Lippi,' and talked of men and things in the country we came from, in a way that sent sleep farther from our eyes than the memory of anything real and tangible was from our minds."

Finally, the two men afterwards agreed in affirming that when daylight came, slowly effacing the dying night of the Bush, the man with the grey beard pulled

his rugs over his shoulders and lay down. Then the taller traveller said: —

"Won't you tell us what you are, and why you are here?"

At this, the bushman, laughing in his beard, turned on one elbow and looked at his questioner. While he looked, his face grew drawn and sad, and the laugh died out of his blood-shot eyes, as he said: —

"I am — well, I suppose in the Islands, in the East, they would call me a beachcomber."

Then the end of the dead laugh came back to life for one moment, and the older man, lowering his elbow again, the three fell asleep.

CHAPTER III

THE MAN IN THE GUNYAH

WHEN the sun was well up in a sky of ripply blue, and the great fragrant clusters of wattle-blossom down the gully were quivering in the luxury of that heat which, in New South Wales, comes an hour or so before noon-day, a red spider, with a black head and deliberate movements, crawled onto the short man's nose and woke him.

He opened his eyes, and the door which shuts the man sleeping from the man waking, slammed to in his head, whisking up as it closed a little panorama in which he saw mistily: a woman waving her hand at the garden-gate of a Devonshire farm-house; a ship's deck from which passengers were straining their eyes to make out the loom of the Heads outside Sydney harbour; a moonlit track winding between dead gum-trees; a man with a huge grey beard, whose face was a picture of hunger-mocking strength.

He raised himself, and threw a morsel of damper at the back of the tall man's head. "Hi!" he said, hurriedly assuming a wide-awake air, "are you going to lie there sleeping all day?"

Middle Greyness

Then they both sat up in their flour-sack bunks, and stared blinkingly out into the dazzling sunlight, where they saw their host dropping tea from a battered canister into the billy of boiling water which hung over the fire. The man looked fresh though rather haggard, in the brilliant sunshine. His hat was far back on its owner's shaggy head, and over his beard drops of water sparkled brightly. There was a creek in the little gully below the gunyah. The travellers did not once refer to the previous night. And, in some vague way, both had a desire to appear at their best in the eyes of the unkempt bushman, who evidently cared not a solitary jot what his guests might think of him.

The three men had a little meal together, and talked of the surfaces of things; the road to Narrabri and the time to be occupied in getting there. Then, after a smoke on the shady side of the gunyah, they saddled their horses in the early afternoon, and the bushman led them through the gully onto the track by the iron-bark log. There was something in his face which held at arm's length the curiosity it aroused, and the two men felt no inclination to make jocular remarks or to ask questions.

"You 'll be on the Narrabri road in an hour," said their host; "but don't leave the track whatever you do, and you can sleep in a real brick-and-mortar hotel to-night. Good-bye! Not at all. Every man's camp is a home in the Bush, unless—you know him too well. Good-bye!"

The Man in the Gunyah

And when the short man, turning in his saddle to look back from the first bend in the track, waved his hat, he saw this bushman leaning against the iron-bark log and ramming tobacco into the bowl of his pipe.

The two men had drifted past him as they drifted to him, and the bushman, having lighted his pipe, laughed drily to himself as he jerked a long axe from out the place where it stuck in the fallen log. While the afternoon shadows stretched farther down the side of the gully, the muscles of the man's arms swelled, and his loose shirt rucked and creased in moist folds that grew moister with every swing of the seven-pound axe. The reciter of "Fra Lippo Lippi" was breaking out iron-bark sleepers; and when the short Australian twilight had almost finished its hasty burial of the bright day, four red, splintery sleepers lay in the rough by the side of the track, ready for the touch of the squaring adze.

Then the bushman who had called himself a beach-comber, gave his axe a final whirl which sent its blade, with a "Clumph!" that echoed all down the gully, far into the hard red wood, where it was left, quivering. He stood for a minute looking across to the Warroo Hills, through that indistinct blue haze which seems to surround the birth of night in the Bush, with a veiled mysticism well suited to the weirdness which comes later. Then, with one foot extended, he touched the kangaroo dog, who lay stretched at full length on the track.

Middle Greyness

"What is scenery before dinner?" he muttered, smoothing one of the creased sleeves of his shirt. "Satan, you pompous fraud, we will feed."

The dog rose, yawning till his mouth seemed larger than his sinewy body, and the two walked slowly down the gully to the bark humpy on the other side. Arrived there, the bushman performed his evening toilette beside the big log, and, having spread some eatables on the whiskey case by his bunk, filled his billy-can and hung it over the fire. Then he sat down on the heap of flour bags at the entrance to the gunyah, and leaning forward picked up a double sheet of newspaper which lay stained and crumpled on the ground. This was one of the papers his guests of the previous night had carried with them.

The moon had hardly thrown its earliest rays through the tree-tops then, so it must have been the flickering light of his fire that enabled the bushman to read the closely printed English newspaper. Anyhow, he sat there reading, and the grey beard sank lower and lower between the knee-caps of his long boots, as the man bent over his crumpled sheet.

The big log in the centre of the fire was blazing and smouldering, and the billy-can rocked to and fro in excitement, as the water in it bubbled and hissed over its sides till very little else but steam was left. Still the man sat poring over the stained newspaper, and gazing fixedly at a column down the centre of which ran a long irregular whiskey stain. This column was headed "University Jottings;" and when

the bottom had fallen out of the dry billy-can, and the light of the fire had dwindled down to nothing, the bushman still sat by the side of his untasted dinner, staring at or through the column on which drops of the Englishman's whiskey had fallen.

The paragraph at the first line of which the man's beard had begun to droop, and the last line of which had ended his reading, opened thus: —

"Speaking of the 'Varsity cricket match naturally causes reference to the captain of the Oxford team. Mr. Robert Manton Darley is, we understand, already spoken of in his college as one of the strongest classic men of his year, and certainly his performance at the Oval on Saturday showed him to be one of the most brilliant cricketers the senior University has produced for many seasons."

At last, Satan, who had watched the destruction of the billy-can with cynical indifference, awoke to the painful reality of his still dinnerless situation, and, walking to the front of the gunyah, howled dismally.

"Go to the devil!" said the man, raising his head sharply. Then as an afterthought he added, "Here, poor beggar, feed!" And he threw the chunk of damper he had cut for himself to the dog, who wolfed it with that machine-like precision and silent rapidity which distinguishes the kangaroo dog when hungry, and causes the animal's face to wear a look of quiet watchful expectancy which says plainly, "Now that that unconsidered trifle has been dispatched, I wait your permission to proceed to more serious business."

But the bushman paid no further attention to his dog; and when the stained newspaper fell from between his knees to the ground, the man's beard moved nervously as he muttered, "So Mr. Robert Manton Darley is a success — already." Then he rose slowly and, walking out into the moonlight, surveyed, with a strange expression of half amused irony on his face, the remains of his billy-can.

"That I should drink whiskey only to-night, is not of itself a deplorable fact, but it is distinctly sad to reflect that I shall have no tea to-morrow morning."

The man muttered this softly, as he stood gazing at the smouldering middle log of his fire; and then, kicking the useless billy far away towards the little gully, he filled his pipe, and sat down on the end of the log outside his gunyah.

CHAPTER IV

THE MAN BEFORE THE GUNYAH

"MR. ROBERT MANTON DARLEY," the coming man of his year at Oxford, was the eldest son of the self-styled beachcomber; and the beachcomber's indifference in the matter of his domestic arrangements for that night, was caused by reflection on the probable career of this son and one other, and on the circumstances connected with the occasion on which he had last seen these two children of his.

This led to thoughts of his own early life; and the man sitting on the log recalled the experiences of a young officer in a crack regiment, living in another world where there was no Bush. He remembered a beautiful young wife's shame, when her gallant, brilliant husband was forced to leave his regiment. Then his recollections were misty, covering as they did a feverish life of mad extremes, — a diplomatic appointment as attaché in a British embassy on the Continent; splendid resolutions and secret excesses; and, finally, a horrid smear of shame which was blotted out and covered over by powerful influences.

Then, in the hushing process, thought the man on the log, a pure woman's heart broke; and he remem-

bered standing by his wife's grave in a quiet old cemetery in Hampshire. Those two boys. Yes, it must be kept from them. He would tone down to middle greyness the mad hungers of his passionate nature; he would lead a clean life for their sakes, that the world might feel the power of his own strong mind as reproduced in sober steadiness in his sons.

The man sitting on the log smiled bitterly, and tapped his pipe on the side of his boot.

He remembered the awful, helpless feeling which had come over him, as he gradually realised that a broken man, broken in name and pocket, and to some extent in mind, could not bring his sons out in those grooves of the world where fame and success are mostly found. Then, how on a day in that old life, when the very helplessness of the middle grey course had driven him to one of his lurid extremes, James Anthony Cumming, his millionaire cousin, had visited him. This cousin, the representative of huge inherited success and of the respectability of wealth, had, in all his intolerance of extremes and lurid lights, taunted the broken man with the hopeless permanence of the black streak which had broken him.

But, the beachcomber had thought, this vain man of mediocrities, whose soul was colourless, he represented wealth, unlimited power, the world's approval, and success. He could make lives, and held in his weak hands all that which the disgraced diplomat longed to give his sons, that they might carry on and live the life of his power.

The Man before the Gunyah

"Disappear utterly. Efface yourself; hang yourself for all I care," the millionaire had said brutally. "But disappear, and I will make the lives of these two boys. Give your sons to me. Let me mould them as I choose, and I will bring them both up to manhood with all that money can give them. I will be just to both. Then I will take one, — the one who is to succeed, — and his life I will make. I will give him fame and power. I will make him great. There is nothing that he cannot do, and my wealth shall be his wealth. But" — and the millionaire had shaken his weak white hand in the broken man's face — "you cross their lives for one minute, and I will never see them again. You are rotten to the core. You know it. And where you touch the lives of those boys you will rot them."

The man on the log remembered how he had ground his teeth. But his passionate desire for power and fame for one of the boys, who should carry on his strength to a goal beyond his reach, was strong in him. And he had consented.

"Remember," his rich cousin had said — this cousin who was eleven years his senior — "remember you disappear forever, to-day — this week. You vanish; and the day you come again into their lives, I drop them once and for all."

He had agreed — the man who now sat pondering in the moonlit Bush — he had agreed, and had disappeared. He had effaced himself, and wandered through the world, drifting southwards ever, his extremes growing

more lurid, his grey intervals less neutral. A beachcomber, a world's tramp, an outcast, he had drifted to and fro in Lower Bohemia, till he paused in the gunyah by the track to Warroo Hills.

And this Mr. Robert Manton Darley who seemed already to be gaining power was his son, his eldest son. The man on the log wondered idly whether any people in that other world where his sons were, remembered him, Henry Manton Darley, who, sixteen years before, had sat at a Royal table, in a European court, and chatted with great ladies in Mayfair drawing-rooms.

"Bah!" he muttered, as he rose and walked nervously round the log. "Who ever is remembered, and who but a fool would want to be? I should forget Rabelais if I had n't him in print. That's the charm of my bottles from Lethe."

Walking round the log the man smiled under his grizzled moustache, as his last muttered phrase recalled to his mind his two raw visitors of the night before. He paused and rested one foot on the log.

"And in a month or so, those two will be going back to England, going into that other world that they, poor fools, will never even know exists, — there where my boys are, where one of them is going to live me." He gripped his knee with one strong brown hand, "Me, in the middle course of strength. But, curse it, which of them is it? Has he got my mind? Will he know; or will that rich mass of emptiness cloak him in weakness as well as greyness?"

The Man before the Gunyah

Darley's hands were moist and hot, and his shoulders quivered with excitement as he thought these things; but his thoughts ceased to shape themselves in spoken words. Only a mad hunger, stronger than words could tell, was surging to and fro in the man's mind, — the longing to see for himself, to feel with his own hands, the lives that were opening and budding in that far-away world of England, to himself turn the key that should open to them the door of their manhood, and plant in them his own strong grasp of the world and its ways; to see which, if either, of them had the strength to carry on his own vivid force of mind, freed from the weight of the black streak which in him brought longing for excess, and seize and hold power in the world.

Suddenly the man drew his foot down from the log, and threw his grey head back in the moonlight.

"By God in Heaven, I will!" he said. "I'll go back to the old world, and see them."

And before he turned in for the night, Darley the beachcomber took his saddle down from where it rested on the ridgepole of the gunyah, and in the bags which hung on either side of it, he stowed his books and a few small odds and ends. He referred to a letter from a Sydney bank, for during all his years of drifting, there was a small — a very small — annuity, which Darley had drawn, but could not realise upon. So that was still his.

It was long past midnight when he returned from his walk along the gully, where he had been to as-

sure himself that his old black horse was still peacefully browsing by the creek side. He stood pondering at the entrance to the gunyah for a moment, while the kangaroo dog, lying stretched in the moonlight, languidly licked his master's boot.

"Yes, by Heavens, I 'll go!" he said; and then, pushing his untasted dinner aside, he lay down to sleep.

CHAPTER V

AND THE PLACE KNEW HIM NOT

SLOWLY the big ship drifted on towards the place she was to occupy; and the deck-hands, standing by the windlass under the foc'sle head, had their eyes fixed on the figure of a keen-looking little man who walked briskly to and fro on the bridge.

You might, had you been watching her slowly drifting, have thought the question of what patch of water the ship was finally to lie in, a matter of pure chance. But it was no question of chance to the little man on the bridge. He was a Plymouth pilot; and the surface of the water, which you would have found the same from one side of the harbour to the other, save that a cloudy sky made some portions darker than others, was to him as distinctly marked off in sections as a draught-board is to you. In his mind he could see, within a fathom or so, the exact spot in which the vessel's stern would lie, and the water she would cover in swinging with the tide during the night.

At last, he waved his short forefinger to the first mate; and, for thirty seconds, the great ship shivered from stem to stern, as, sending up a red cloud of dust

from the hawse-pipe, one of her anchors went tearing through the cool water to the bottom of Plymouth Harbour.

The vessel was an Australian liner fresh from the sunny South; and amongst the throng of eager passengers who were gazing at the shore from her hurricane deck, one tall man, with a close-clipped grey beard, wore on his face an expression of cynical indifference to a situation which seemed to have aroused enthusiasm in every one else.

Dressed very plainly in a suit of blue serge, Darley looked much younger, and was in every way a modified and toned-down edition, of the man who on a moonlight night, just eight weeks before, had sat poring over a crumpled sheet of newspaper in the gunyah at Warroo. The manifold atmospheric influences with which England surrounds herself were already at work upon this man.

To some of England's sons, particularly when returning to her shores after lengthened absence, the orderly complexity of her civilisation permeates the very sea which surrounds her for hundreds of miles.

"By Gad, sir!" said a big, red-haired man on the hurricane deck of the ship. "It's eleven years since I saw this coast and that town; and it looks to me just the same dear old place as ever. Seems to welcome you home as though you'd only left last week, does n't it, sir?"

The man from the gunyah, sitting on the ship's rail with his back to it all, smiled at the genuine en-

thusiasm of the question. "Think so?" he said. "Well, it's nearly sixteen years since I last saw it, and it does n't look the same to me. It seems rather to be asking for my credentials than offering a welcome. But I daresay you 're right — I 've no doubt you are; but — it does n't strike me so, that 's all."

And the red-headed man walked away to the gangway to shake hands with a boatman, because that boatman had just come from the shore; and, as he walked, he recorded a mental note to the effect that the man from Warroo was an "unfeeling beast."

Darley, whose name was down in the passenger list as Arthur Crawford, went ashore in the tender with his luggage, and had some tea at the Marine Hotel. The steering gear of the Australian liner was out of order, and as she was to remain at Plymouth all the following day, instead of proceeding direct to London, Darley decided to travel overland. For two or three weeks the feeling had been growing upon him that his journey from the Bush into his old world, was purposeless and a mistake; and, when he entered the train for London on that Saturday evening, there was no shadow of a pleasant anticipation in his mind.

As the train approached the outskirts of the world's metropolis, two or three suburban residents, holding evening papers in their hands, took seats in Darley's compartment; and the man who had drifted all over a hemisphere felt oppressed by a sense of his loneliness and strangeness to it all.

Arrived in London, he told a cabman to drive him

to a hotel off Trafalgar Square. When his cab drew up outside the entrance of the big building, two men in evening-dress were walking down the steps arm-in-arm, and a porter with a gold-laced cap laid his hand on Darley's possum-skin rug.

"No,—never mind," said the man from the Bush. "Cabby, drive down Fleet Street. Go into Holborn. Take me to—the Angel Islington."

So, the man who had just completed a voyage across the world started on a journey from one of London's worlds which he knew, to another which had never been his.

Then came Sunday—Sunday to a stranger in London. By early evening there was nothing apparent in Darley, save the fatal weakness of his nature's black streak. He made a strong appeal to the waters of Lethe, and England was nothing to him, and he less to England, for three days.

Then, looking paler and more grey than when he landed, Darley drove to Paddington in the early morning. He carried a bag marked, A. Crawford, and took train for Oxford. Eight days he spent in the grand old city on the Isis; and from the window of his room at the Mitre, he sat for hours watching undergraduates and dons passing up and down the High. The man was quite certain that neither of his sons could possibly recognise him; but a strong feeling, which he could have hardly explained to himself, made him each day more determined not to come into actual contact with them.

And the Place knew Him Not

The two brothers occupied rooms at Brasenose, and one sunny afternoon, when all Oxford was out of doors, the man from Warroo, with the aid of a little Australian gold, was enabled to spend half an hour in his sons' quarters. He talked of them to their respective scouts, and even managed to strike up a conversation with a Brasenose tutor, who, in the intervals of a discourse delivered in the Bodleian library, on the degeneracy of undergraduates in the aggregate, gave him some useful information about Mr. Robert Manton Darley and that gentleman's younger brother William.

From the windows of the Mitre, from over the parapet of Folly Bridge, and in a dozen different places; he saw the brothers together and alone, noticed what types they respectively adhered to, and judged, by the very hats they wore, what sets they most affected. He heard his younger son spoken of by a don as, "A young man with a great deal more in him than has the average undergrad;" and he learnt that Robert would certainly be an Ireland man.

These things were soothing to the man from the South. Without speaking to either of them, he yet studied both brothers carefully, and, in a few days, learned perhaps more of them than either knew of himself. Still his decision in the upshot of it all was that neither were accessible to any influence of his.

To the wanderer it was a wonderful study. To the man effaced by and forgotten of civilisation, there was a strange fascination in watching the budding into the life of culture and learning — the atmosphere of knowl-

edge and power — of these two images of his own mind. So far away he felt, he the beachcomber, that the idea of speaking to Robert or Will then, seemed unnatural. He lived and breathed in a different sphere, and this old world which had been his, did not recognise or want to know the man from Warroo. Its doors were absolutely closed to him.

So he journeyed back to London, smiling bitterly as an old porter whom he remembered having tipped munificently in his own college days, brushed past him on the station platform at Oxford in his haste to relieve a laughing freshman of his portmanteau.

"Steady, Joe," he muttered on the spur of the moment. "Don't knock an old friend down in your hurry."

But the porter only stared at his grey beard in unrecognising surprise and hurried on.

"Dear hospitable old country," said Darley, as he stepped into the train. "By the powers, I want to get out into the open."

Darley was convinced that his journey had been a wasted one, and he felt farther away from the old world than he had ever felt in the South. Yet the visit had served to choke, and, for the time, almost to satisfy, the man's savage longing to put himself into the lives of his sons. They were not ripe, and he did not know which was to be the strong man; though in his inmost mind he leaned towards his first-born as being the most practical, — the one best suited to live in the middle grey course, and force the world his way.

And the Place knew Him Not

So, wavering slightly in the end, but never seriously contemplating direct contact with the two young lives, the world's tramp drifted on to that side of London which in other places is the beach, and with the hunger for the Bush and the open, strong upon him, started on his way South.

One evening, less than three months afterwards, a man, mounted on a Bush pony, turned off the Narrabri road on the bridle track below White Ridge, just as the haze of night was rising between the bare trunks of the gum-trees. A black kangaroo dog loped along by the side of the pony, and barked furiously as the two scrambled up the side of the Warroo gully. The gunyah looked exactly the same, save that one sheet of stringy bark had been torn from its side by the wind.

On the edge of the gully, Darley stooped and picked up a rusty billy-can, the bottom of which had been burnt out. As he stood at the front of the gunyah, and reached for the leathern hobbles which still hung on a peg over his bunk, a long, brown 'guana slithered down the ridgepole, and scuttled out through the coarse grass towards the gully.

"My friend," muttered the beachcomber, "the lord of the manor comes into his own again. Sho! Worry him, Satan."

Part II

CHAPTER VI

TWO MEN AND A MAIDEN

"THAT, Trottie mine, did you but know it, is just where sculling rises to the level of an art, and beautified by a little humbug is almost sublime."

"I don't care a bit about its art, Robert; but I wish you 'd do some of the work, and let poor Will rest, for a change."

"I do some of the work! Why, my dear child, I 'm doing all the work. That is where my perfect sculling comes in; to do so much without apparent exertion, whilst Will does so little, — absolutely nothing, as a matter of fact, — and makes a big show of it. He triumphs over me outwardly, I confess. My power is unassuming. But that the boat shoots forward under his stroke, is purely a delusion on your part. Ask him. Is n't that so, Will?"

"Eh? Yes, I daresay you 're right; but I don't know in the least what you are talking about. Let 's pull into the shade under those willows, and laze, — shall we? I am melting."

"There, Trottie. Now, perhaps, you will grasp the truth of my contention. The idler longeth for

more complete idleness, and cryeth aloud for the shade of green willow-trees. Just pull the boat's head round, and tie the painter somewhere, like a good fellow, Will."

It was a beautiful little gig that the three were sitting in, and all its appointments, from the delicately enamelled monograms on the blades of the sculls to the luxurious fittings of its stern sheets, were perfect of their kind. On its bows had been painted the name "Fairie." This was by order of Trottie's father, who regarded any one who read poetry as a weak-minded individual of very small account.

The Fairie was pulled into a shady nook under the willows which fringe the banks of the backwater below Sunbury; and, later on, it would be paddled down stream to the rustic boat-house which stands on the lawn of the garden above Teddington Lock. That is the garden of the house where Trottie was born, and where her father, Mr. James Anthony Cumming, spent a large part of many of his summers. His tastes in travel were not extravagant; and, despite his wealth, he had never in his life strayed farther from Charing Cross than the south of France, and infinitely preferred the Thames Valley to any of fashion's summer resorts, — a taste in itself worthy respectful consideration, particularly when found in a man who despises poetry.

St. John's Wood knows better than Belgravia, what is good and pleasant, and St. John's Wood loves its Lower Thames Valley during the few short months

in which the willows trail their streamers tenderly in shady water, and the golden osiers rustle and whisper love to one another through the afternoon sunshine. True, Mr. Cumming was not interested, to any appreciable extent, in the love-stories of the osiers, neither did anything in him respond readily to the plaintive tenderness of the willow's trailing weeds; but he loved to smoke his morning cigar at the open windows of the room over Trottie's boat-house, and found that tea and strawberries and cream, served in the afternoon behind the elms on the lawn, appealed strongly to his inner susceptibilities. His winters he spent at his country seat in Hampshire; and when he visited the Riviera, he went in time to enjoy the beautiful Provencal spring from which society foolishly hurries away.

The Fairie being made fast, Will Darley stretched himself in the bow of the boat, and dreamily gazed into the crown of his straw hat. Robert Darley, his brother's senior by three years, reclined comfortably on the cushions Trottie had thrown to him in the middle of the boat; and the girl herself, — bright, wayward Trottie, with her vivid April face in a glorious October setting of brown curls, — Trottie retained her seat in the stern-sheets, fitfully splashing her little hand in and out the cool water over the boat's-side.

It was good to lie there and listen to the water lapping on the roots of the willows, and Robert Darley's epigrammatic remarks, with reference to the occupants of the one or two boats which drifted

past, were rather wasted; for his brother Will was dreaming in idle unconsciousness of all things tangible, and epigrams did not interest Trottie, because she was not in the best of tempers.

Six months had elapsed since the two young Darleys had been studied through an upper window of the Mitre at Oxford, by the man from the gunyah. Will was in his first year at Oxford then, and his brother, having taken his degree with high honours, had since left the University, and become, for the time, a man of leisure. Trottie's father, who had brought both the young men up as his sons, was pleased with the elder's promising start in life. Robert had passed through his 'Varsity career with striking success, and was spoken of as a young man of exceptional talent who would certainly make his mark in the world. At Oxford there had been talk of one or two strange wild episodes in his life, but James Cumming heard nothing of this, and Robert's actual record was a brilliant one.

It was practically certain that within four months he would enter the House of Commons as a member of Parliament. Only that morning James Cumming had heard from Captain Varney-Weyman to the effect that, when the Government went to the country in October, he, the captain, would withdraw in favour of young Mr. Darley, and leave the constituency of Bramwood, so far as he was concerned, uncontested. Now James Cumming's country seat was at Bramwood, and that quiet division of Hampshire was practically owned by him. Captain Varney-Weyman was

certainly distinctly his property; and the absence of anything like real opposition from the sleepy inhabitants of Bramwood district to the nominee of millionaire Cumming, really reminded one of the comfortable pocket-borough period of this century's history.

So Robert — it was part of his character that he should be always called Robert; he was not Bob to any friend, and his brother was never William — so, Robert Darley was not dreaming mere idle dreams when amongst the pictures he saw in the smoke of his cigarette on this June afternoon, he dwelt particularly on one showing himself as occupant of a seat in the House of Commons before the end of the year.

During the two months which had passed since he left Oxford, the older of James Cumming's wards had spent most of his time at Bramwood, in making himself friendly with the people of the district, to the most influential among whom he had been known since childhood. Now, he was entering upon a three months' stay in town, in the course of which he was to devote himself to the study of current politics and Parliamentary procedure; and it had been decided that he should spend the month preceding the general election, at Bramwood.

"Robert," said Trottie, abstractedly, after gazing at the elder brother for some time, "you should n't smile to yourself, and say nothing of the joke; it 's as bad as whispering."

"Should I not, revered lady? I 'm sorry that I did, particularly as I have no joke to tell of."

"Well, you look just as though you had suddenly discovered that England was a beautiful country, and were determined to buy it for yourself."

Robert laughed. "Give me credit for a little modesty. Say win, not buy; and the best it has to give, not the whole country."

"Trottie means that it was too aggressively cocksure for this afternoon. That's all you meant, was n't it, Troddles?" said Will.

Trottie nodded gravely, and the party lapsed into languid silence again, as Will almost choked in his endeavour to avoid swallowing his pipe without lifting a hand to move it from his lips.

The younger brother was wont to say that cigarettes and tall hats required "too much looking after." He liked things that would "take care of themselves." Will had left Rugby a year earlier in life than Robert; but he still had almost two years to spend at Oxford. A severe illness, followed by a lengthy sojourn in the South of France, had intervened between school and college with him; and, apart from this, his life had been altogether in rather a minor key as compared to that of his brilliant brother. He had been liked at Rugby, and had always succeeded fairly well both in sports and studies; but he had achieved nothing striking, and his school record came nowhere near Robert's. Boys called him "Good old Will," and summed up his character by describing him as, "An awfully good old sort, if he is a bit slow."

As he grew into manhood, Will had been much

beloved by a few, and very little noticed by the majority of those with whom he came in contact. But no one disliked him and, oddly enough, dashing, clever Robert was secretly rather afraid of this younger brother of his, in whose mind diplomacy seemed to have as little place as respect for the conventionalities.

Now James Cumming had never heard Will called "a good old sort," and would have been very little impressed by the expression of opinion had he heard it. He was rich in the immortal Gradgrind's love of facts, and preferred basing his opinions on official reports, to being guided by friendship's irresponsible comments. Therefore Will's career, so far, and sundry tendencies of mind displayed in the younger man's actions, had disappointed Trottie's wealthy father, and led him to wax even more enthusiastic over Robert's strength.

So, whilst Robert, lounging in the middle of Trottie's boat, reviewed achievements in the smoke of his cigarette, and pictured coming accomplishments; Will, in his place in the bows, sketched hazy, indistinct outlines of dreamy ideals in the blue smoke of his briar, and dreamed of intangible beauties in a career as mistily unreal as were the sunny environments with which his fancy draped it.

Trottie was rather out of humour with herself, because she had been realising for some minutes that she was not in a good temper. When a tender-hearted girl is out of temper, it is almost invariably owing to annoyance at something she believes she has

discovered in herself, rather than to anything for which some one else is responsible.

"I almost wish I were a young lady!" ejaculated Trottie, with a sudden swish of her hand which frightened the ducks in her immediate neighbourhood into a frenzied scuttle over the water.

"Well, are n't you?" queried Robert, as, "Good heavens, why?" fell from Will's lips.

"If I were a young lady, you two would tell me what the weather was like, and if this was a better boating season than last, and —"

"Troddles, you are making my collar stick into my neck!"" mumbled Will, from his place in the bows.

"It 's a lovely day, Miss Cumming, and there are a lot more people on the river this year than last; and —"

"Robert, I shall shy a stretcher at you in a minute," said Will. "It 's criminal, on an afternoon like this."

"You see, Trottie, the risk I run in giving you the benefit of my conversational ability even for a moment; and, all things considered, do you think you do want to be talked to this afternoon?"

"No, for goodness' sake, let 's laze, the other 's an insult to the sunshine," said Will, raising the brim of his hat quite an inch from his nose as he spoke.

"Well, I think it 's horribly rude of you both; but — perhaps it is nicer. Look at that brown duck; it thinks my hand is a weed, or water lily, or something."

"Weed, Troddles, weed undoubtedly," chuckled

the man in the bow. And then the three became silent again.

Trottie had been chafing all the afternoon under a sense of oppression. She had been conscious, or fancied she had, of a superior and patronising tone in Robert's remarks, and an inclination on his part to treat her as a child, — she who would be seventeen in less than a week.

Now Trottie was very much attached to her two cousins, as she had been taught to consider the young Darleys, whilst always treating them as brothers. She admired both immensely, in different ways, and was deeply interested in all Robert's doings and Will's dreamings. So it jarred on some half-hidden chord in her sensitive nature to find that since his leaving Oxford, and becoming a politician in embryo, Robert had adopted a half-bantering, half-proprietary tone in speaking to her, such as one might use to a petted child. And now she was somewhat out of temper, not because of this tone of Robert's, but because she realised that it had been making her appear petulant.

She was not the kind of daughter one would have expected James Cumming to be father to; and perhaps if her mother had not died during Trottie's infancy, she would have been a very different girl at seventeen. As it was, this daughter of a millionaire had developed with as much freedom as the child of a Bohemian painter might have done. Her appearance in the world had been an intense disappointment to

James Cumming, whose feeling towards the sex was that of an Oriental, without the Eastern capability of love, or reserve force of passion.

"The only thing a girl can do in the world," the millionaire had more than once said, "is to marry a man who has succeeded. But a man — he may succeed."

A month before that sunny afternoon on the river below Sunbury, Trottie's governess had complained to Mr. Cumming with reference to her pupil's unwillingness to perform certain allotted tasks. James Cumming had shrugged his shoulders, and said that Trottie had better be allowed to do as she chose. That had been the key-note really of her whole bringing up; and that Trottie was at seventeen a very charming, if a somewhat wilful maiden, was due to the natural sweetness of her disposition, and not in any sense to her environment or education.

Robert and Will had to her always been brothers to whom she was devoted; she loved the kindly old nurse whose services James Cumming had retained since his marriage; she was affectionately tolerant of her prim, precise, little governess, passionately fond of her dogs and her pony, and, scorning her studies, could still become oblivious to all things, in the perusal of certain poetry and fiction of her own selection. That roughly represented all the world in which Trottie lived and was growing into womanhood. From it she drew a good deal of happiness and enjoyment, despite the vague longings for knowledge of

things she knew not of, which, coming upon her occasionally in fits of dreamy wonder, caused questions and remarks to fall from her lips which scandalised sadly the worthy Miss Lipston, her governess.

"I've been stupid and cross, Robert dear," said Trottie, drawing her hand in over the side of the boat, and resting it apologetically on the elder brother's arm, regardless quite of the water which trickled down from the little brown fingers. "I can't help being stupid sometimes; but I really did n't mean to be cross. I 'm so sorry."

Will looked lazily up from under the brim of his straw hat, and Robert, with a laugh, brushed the drops of water from his coat-sleeve, as he said: —

"My dear little Trottie, what 's troubling your tender heart now? You could n't be cross if you tried; and as to being stupid, you 're the cleverest little girl in England, and steer a boat divinely. Now I, on the contrary, am rather stupid, because I have been thinking — an absurdity at any time — about the rustic population of Bramwood, instead of trying to make myself pleasant to you."

"But I have been horrid, whatever you say, Robert," persisted Trottie. "And I 've been thinking ridiculous things, and — being stupid."

For a moment Robert's eyes expressed some surprise. Then, drawing himself into a sitting posture, he laughed again, as though to dissipate the girl's seriousness, and said, "What a dear funny introspective little sister it is, and how quaint for you, Trottie,

to take the burden on your shoulders of our insufferable dulness. We 've been enjoying the laze as though we were alone, and you 've grown a little tired — no wonder. Never mind, little woman, we 'll now discuss Shakespeare and the musical glasses."

" It 's all very well, but I 've been a little wretch," murmured the penitent.

" Troddles," said Will, slowly, from his end of the boat, " you are not to call yourself names; because — "

" Because dewy eve is approaching," broke in Robert; " and in you is our trust placed to guide us out of this maze of willows into the stream. Come on, Will, we shall have to travel; we 're late as it is."

Trottie laughed as the Fairie shot out into the stream, from under the willows, and harmony seemed re-established, if it had really been broken, with the resumption of conversation. Yet for some reason, Trottie's eyebrows had contracted, at Robert's: —

" You could n't be cross if you tried! "

CHAPTER VII

A GREAT FRIEND OF MINE

"I THINK we might do a spurt down to Molesey, Will," said Robert; "just to try our form; and it will give us time to loaf past the band at Surbiton."

"All right, old man, though personally I confess I 'm prepared to take the form as tested."

Robert and Will threw off their coats, and once out in mid-stream, the Fairie went gliding along at racing speed. By the time Molesey Lock was reached, Trottie was in high spirits, and had quite forgotten her momentary annoyance at what she fancied was Robert's patronising tone. He was so strong, and talked so well and confidently. To her his confidence was actual achievement, and she had all a girl's love of strength and success. Robert was able to talk well and cleverly, and it was his nature to do his best in this direction, and to say all he had to say with a view to possible effect, even when himself unconscious of the desire.

On this occasion he had noticed the trace of "crossness," in Trottie, which he had told her could not exist; and as they pulled down the river in the cool

evening air, he set himself to please and amuse the naturally bright girl whose good opinion he valued highly, and of whom he was really very fond.

So the lock-keeper at Molesey was constrained to turn and listen to the musical ripple of Trottie's laughter as he pulled the Fairie over the rollers. The bridge at Hampton Court being passed, the girl entertained her cavaliers with softly murmured snatches of songs from a comic opera — the first she had ever witnessed — which James Cumming had been induced to allow her to attend, with her brothers and Miss Lipston, on the previous evening.

She made a charming picture, sitting there in the soft evening light, leaning far back among the cushions of the Fairie's stern-sheets, her dark hair pressed forward in wavy curls on either side of a face bright with girlish freshness and womanly tenderness. Her hands were raised, holding one tiller rope over each shoulder, and her whole lissom form seemed to vibrate happiness and music. Robert was charmed, and forgot to criticise the occupants of passing boats; and when Trottie, having ceased her singing, made some jocular remark about the impropriety of her own behaviour, Will said: —

"No, no, Trottie, don't say anything. Sing and be an angel, and keep us all in heaven."

So they glided past the grand old wall of the Palace grounds at Hampton Court, and, nearing Surbiton promenade, drew in to the bank to avoid a pleasure steamer snorting along in mid-stream.

Suddenly Robert looked fixedly at a knot of men standing on the tow-path. "By Jove!" he said. "There's Rollo Croft. Excuse me, Trottie, but we must pull in and speak to Rollo. Who in the world would have thought of seeing him here?"

Trottie noticed a slim, dark man standing in front of the group on the tow-path, and saw that he raised his hat as Robert waved his hand. When the boat's head was turned towards the bank, Robert said:

"I thought he was in Paris. You won't mind if I leave you, will you, Trottie? Will will take the best of care of you, and I think I must go with Croft. I shall get out of these things and dress at my rooms in town." He seemed quite excited in the matter.

"But, Robert," said Trottie, in a whisper, for the boat was close to the bank now; "who is Rollo Croft?"

Robert smiled as he jerked his sculls into the boat.

"Ah, that's too long a story, little girl. Rollo Croft is a particular friend of mine, whom you've never met. He's done a great deal for me, and he's an artist — the most artistic man in England. There — good-bye, Trottie! You'll manage all right alone, Will, won't you? How are you, Croft, old man?"

And springing onto the bank, Robert held out his hand to the tall man, who bowed again in Trottie's direction, as Will, with a couple of strong strokes, sent the Fairie shooting out towards mid-stream.

"Is Rollo Croft a friend of yours, Will?" asked

A Great Friend of Mine

Trottie, turning her brown eyes onto her cousin, who, now that the boat was in mid-stream, had resumed his gentle paddling stroke.

"Friend of mine — no!" said Will, hastily. And then as though to modify the expression: "That is, you know, very few men are friends of mine, Trottie."

"Who's your pretty friend, Darley?" said the dark man, as the two walked down the tow-path together from where Robert had landed.

"That is my cousin, Trottie Cumming," replied Robert. "But what a wonderful man you are, Rollo, turning up in the way you do, always at precisely the most artistic and interesting moment a man could turn up — always in an atmosphere of your own. Look at the red sunlight on the water over there. By Jove, I'm so devilish glad to see you, old chap! But how are you, and why are you here?"

Rollo Croft smiled as Robert came to a pause in his walk and his talk, and the two leaned against a fence opposite the band-stand. His face was a remarkably handsome one, and when he smiled, it lit up with a beauty which would have been womanly, but for the drooping black moustache that hung over his lips, and the light in a pair of dark eyes which were distinctly a man's eyes, and a strong man's. When he spoke, his voice sounded languid after Robert's eager salutations; but if his tones were low, they were beautifully modulated, and the voice, for a bass, was wonderfully musical.

"It is good of you to be glad to see me," he said; "and your compliments are delightful, though a trifle bewildering when mixed with questions. Still, the energy they display is of course most commendable, and thoroughly in keeping with — forgive my rudeness — this most athletic get up."

The dark man indicated Robert's boating costume by a movement of two fingers, and, resuming, said, "But I thought you were supposed to be studying Hampshire rustics, or Parliamentary debates, or something. As for me, I got out of harmony with myself in Paris, — the Gabelle set are awfully brutal, — so I came back to Kensington. This afternoon I've been working with a man who has a studio at Twickenham, and I came on here because I like the crowd and the river, served with a band and a sunset. You may have noticed that the combination is distinctly picturesque, though either taken separately are insipid, with the exception, perhaps, of the sunset, and even that wants something to focus it, don't you think?"

"Yes, now you mention it, perhaps it does, and the four are good together. Anyhow I'm enjoying them immensely, now."

Robert Darley really did seem to be enjoying something immensely, and his face had a look of exhilaration which it had not worn even whilst he listened to Trottie's singing below Hampton Court.

"Regarding the other part," he said, — "the drudgery, — I only came away from the Hampshire rustics yesterday, and am going to take up my quar-

ters in town on Monday, to begin the London work. But I don't care to think of that now. Tell me about yourself — how are you?"

"I am at the moment in a delightfully invertebrate condition," said Croft, proffering a case of cigarettes to his friend, and choosing one from it himself. "I was rather worried at the prospect of having to eat my dinner alone; but since that band started I 've been perfectly happy. My tastes are delightfully primitive, are they not?"

"They are — the refined essence of crudity."

"Rustic baiting has been conversational wine to you, my friend, evidently. However, I was just about to say, when you so prettily interrupted me, that the only thing which as yet has in any way jarred on me down here, was a little conversation I had with a Salvation Army captain, by the bridge — and even that was too funny to be painful; but — "

Rollo Croft's sentences seemed always to fade rather than to finish.

"He insisted on pushing a question regarding my welfare in the future state, and refused altogether to be comforted when I assured him that I was most serenely happy, even here on this tow-path. Of course I told him I was religious; and when, with unnecessary heat, he demanded to know what my faith was, I told him it was caviarre. Even then, he did n't seem perfectly satisfied; but I thought my assurance had soothed him a little, so I offered him a cigarette. He politely declined, and I walked along here till I

saw you, with your estimable brother, and your very charming cousin. By the way, Darley, don't fall in love with that pretty cousin, and marry. A man strikes the picturesque possibilities out of his life when he marries, and — it 's not fair to his friends."

Robert laughed and beat time on the ground with one foot to the tune of a slow waltz which the band opposite was playing. He said : —

" You forget, my friend, that I am about to forsake the purely picturesque for politics, and have to combine caviarre with worldly success."

" In its alliterativeness that remark is worthy the radical evening press," murmured Croft.

" However, I am not likely to think of the culminating vandalism of matrimony," continued Robert, " even granting that it is a vandalism. But look here, don't let 's talk prospects, old man. What are you thinking of doing ? Where are you going ? "

" I believe I have pointed out," replied Croft, " that I am in a state of ideal invertebracy at the moment. But tell me, what effect on you does the slow movement of that waltz have, taken with the sunset light on the water ? How does it affect your immediate inclinations in the matter of what one ought to do, and where one ought to do it ? I ask because it would be sinfully Gothic under the circumstances to do anything which would not harmonise with this atmosphere."

The band by the water's edge had reached, just then, the dreamiest, most rhythmical movement in the

waltz it was playing. The crowd on the tow-path was swaying idly to and fro, as on summer evenings crowds listening to music will; and from the river came the sound of many sculls splashing in and out the smooth water. The sun had altogether disappeared, and the purple-grey bank of cloud behind which it had fallen, was shot and slashed with a crimson light that was reflected all across the surface of the river.

At Rollo Croft's question, Robert raised his head and looked up the tow-path to the band-stand, so that the warm light of the dying evening fell upon his face. Croft, idly watching his friend at the moment, was puzzled by the expression which came into his eyes, in that dusky, ruddy light. The remains of Robert's habitual look of strong confidence seemed to be fading away, and giving place to a look which the dark man did not altogether comprehend, though it appealed to him as being reminiscent in some way. It was partly the sparkling exhilaration which champagne gives to some, but underlying this was an almost painful look of hunger, — a light of longing, as indefinable as it was passionate. Rollo Croft saw all this in an instant; and then Robert said, in his most eager way: —

"Well, I'll tell you, old man, though the feeling may strike you as barbarous. The effect it has on me is intoxicating. It makes me —" Then Robert laughed, appearing to check himself in something he was about to say, but afterwards continuing:

"And presuming the matter requiring most immediate attention is dinner, I would say that the inclination it gives me is for an atmosphere which shall include, brilliant lights, glossy linen, tall hock glasses, and white wine; to be followed by softer lights, music, cigarette smoke, and — look here, let's go up to town and dine at the Coliseum. What does it make you inclined for, Rollo?"

Robert's friend had ceased to look curious, and replied in the same quiet tone in which he had spoken before: —

"Well, I had a misty notion of having dinner by an open window of the Mitre at Hampton Court, taking the reflection of the lights on the river, as far as the cheese, you know, and then drawing the blinds for coffee and cigarettes. But as I fancy I may have mentioned, I am beautifully invertebrate, and perhaps it would be awkward since you — are clothed for rowing. We must go to the station then. That's distinctly a pity; but, however — "

So the two men strolled down the tow-path, and across the bridge to Kingston station. As they were entering the train which was to take them to town, Robert said: —

"You were quite right, old man, in what you told the Salvation Army captain."

"You mean that I was perfectly happy, there on the towing-path?"

"No, I mean in saying your religion was caviarre, and that you were very religious."

CHAPTER VIII

TROTTIE ON WORLDLY SUCCESS

AFTER Will's somewhat lame explanation of his emphatically direct repudiation of Rollo Croft as a friend, Trottie remained silent, gazing dreamily into the sunset lights reflected on the water, until Will's gentle paddling had taken the Fairie through the main arch of Kingston Bridge. As they entered one of the prettiest reaches on the Lower Thames, and the end of Tatham's Island came into view, Trottie said:

"You don't like Mr. Croft, Will, and so — I believe I should n't like him."

"Oh, but you must n't think that, Trottie; I did n't say I disliked him. To me he always seemed artificial, and to him, I daresay, I am an outer barbarian. Anyhow, we never took to each other. But he is Robert's friend, and — I expect Robert knows best."

"Well, I sha'n't like him, Will, at least I mean I should n't — I am sure I should not."

"Ah, well," said Will, with a softer note in his voice, "I don't know that I want you to like him. But let 's change the subject, Trottie. Remember I 've only been home two days, and I want you to tell

me lots of things yet. I want to know what you 've been doing, and whether Miss Lipston 's been getting you into any difficulties with the pater."

In their intercourse with Trottie, the two brothers had from the beginning been in the habit of referring to James Cumming as though they were actually his sons.

"No," said Trottie, playing idly with the rudder lines in her lap. "No, she 's been really very good, in spite of my wickedness; and Father lets me do everything I want to. It 's been rather dull lately, and I 've wanted you and Robert, of course; but there is always the river, and if Miss Lipston comes with me, she generally goes to sleep. But there 's nothing to tell about me, Will; I want to hear about you."

"You could n't hear much more uninteresting news, Troddles."

"Well, my taste may be depraved, but it is mine. You know before Robert went to Bramwood he and Father used to talk about you at dinner, and — Father said funny things about your sphere of action, or something like that. And, Will, what are you going to do — always, I mean — after you leave Oxford?"

Will rested on his sculls and smiled, as he looked up at Trottie's questioning eyes. And when the smile died away, the girl noticed a queer, half-sad droop about the corners of his mouth, which made her stretch out one hand towards him with the same quaint caressing movement which a few hours before

had caused Robert's coat-sleeve to be sprinkled with river water.

"Don't tell me if it bothers you, Will. I am so stupid, and I had n't thought of its worrying you."

"But it does n't worry me, Trottie," he said, smiling again. "I don't know, that is all. Every one does something, and I suppose I shall fall into line sooner or later; but I cannot say what the groove will be, and I don't want a groove at all. I — I think I hate grooves."

Trottie sighed. "Yes, I did n't mean that exactly," she said. "I don't like them either. Miss Lipston has a groove, and I believe she thinks I ought to, but I can't. I know I never shall. But I suppose one can do things without being in a groove; and I think men ought to — to do something, don't you?"

Will still rested thoughtfully on his sculls, while Trottie's face lighted up with the look one sees on a boy's face as he prefaces a remark with, "When I 'm a man." Then Trottie added: —

"I know you will do whatever you are going to do, beautifully, Will. I 'm certain you are going to succeed; only I thought I 'd like to know what sort of things you would do; because when you begin I don't want you to forget me, and not be able to talk to me."

Trottie stopped short, and could not understand why she fancied she could hear Robert's voice, and the words, "You could not be cross if you tried."

Middle Greyness

"You must n't make up your mind that I 'm going to succeed, Trottie," said Will, slowly. "Because I don't even know what I am going to try and succeed in, and — I daresay the pater's observations were not far wrong. You see I 'm not a clever fellow like Robert, and everything is different, somehow. I know Father wanted me to go into the firm — they still have his name you know; but I would rather almost do anything. I could not go into Parliament like Robert; and I don't want to do any of those things. Do you know, Trottie, I hate the kind of things that most men do when they leave Oxford. They think I 'm idle, and don't want to do any work; and of course I am lazy — now. But yet, somehow, lazy as I am, their lives appear to me painfully empty. They don't seem to live at all. Everything is done by arrangement; and they work it all out on recognised plans and systems, like a game of chess."

Will's face had changed since he began to speak of these things, and the dreamy expression it had worn all the afternoon had left it now. His eyes were alight with feeling and sympathy, and whilst he hesitated a good deal in speaking, all his words were uttered quickly, even eagerly. Trottie, with her chin resting on her two hands, sat listening, intently, her soft eyes responding to every inflection in her cousin's tone.

"I daresay their way is best," continued Will; "but I could not live like that. I would rather go and work in the fields or among horses and dogs. I know this must sound absurd; but — you asked me, so I am

telling you; but I never talk about this to any one else, unless to Hinton. The lives of most of the people we know seem to me so full of routine, so prearranged and helpless. They choose some little groove, like law, or medicine, or something in commerce. Then they get into that, put the collar on their necks, and grind and toil away, never looking anywhere else, giving themselves, their whole souls, to that particular groove — knowing and caring nothing about the people and beautiful things outside; and all to make a position, to obtain something for themselves. They don't seem to want to make anything fresh and leave it there for the world; but only to live their life, get the things they want out of other people, reach a certain point in their groove, and then stop."

Will paused, and Trottie, with a world of innocent wonder in her eyes, said, "Yes, it 's all true, Will — this that you have been saying, and I believe I have thought some of it before. But yet, I suppose they can't help it. I mean it looks as though men must take — must go into some groove, you know. Else how are they to do anything? I can't make what I mean clear; but I want you to be something great, Will, and it seems as though you must begin in some special direction. Father says Robert will be a prime minister. Well, he could n't be a prime minister, I suppose, unless he went into Parliament first." Trottie hesitated. "I wish I could say it properly; but you know what I mean, don't you, Will?"

"Yes, I know what you mean, Trottie, and it's quite true. That is what every one says. If a man wants to be a prime minister, he must go into Parliament, and work away for that particular end. But then I do not want to be a prime minister, and should n't even if I thought I could. You see, Trottie, Robert and the pater decide that he shall be a politician. Very well, then they begin to make arrangements to piece out his life, instead of his living it. In four months he will go into Parliament. He will work away in that groove, and give his whole soul, that ought to be seeing and growing and feeling things in the world, to it. He is very clever, so I expect he will succeed, and perhaps some day he will be a prime minister; and when he dies, it won't be that a life goes out of the world and ceases to live, but that a politician ceases to be a politician, and a vacant spot is left in that groove till some one else slips into it."

Trottie's face, resting still between her hands, looked very serious. "Yes, that sounds sad and empty," she said; "but he will have succeeded, Will, — he will have done all he tried to do, — and I think that is splendid."

"Yes. If that is all he tries to do; if he wants to do no other thing, hopes for nothing else, I suppose that would be — splendid." Will smiled slightly and lowered his voice. "And anyhow it is acknowledged to be the correct plan upon which to go through life; but — Trottie, it is no use my trying to explain — that is not all I want to do, and I don't care to work out

my life on any plan, correct or otherwise. Altogether, my views are really not worth trying to explain, and my ambitions, if I have any, would be sadly disappointing to you. You naturally think a man ought to succeed, — that is the proper thing to think, — and you have great admiration for success. Of course, every one admires it, and everybody is supposed to try and get on. But, Trottie, suppose I told you I had no desire to get on in that way, and did not care particularly whether I as a man, succeeded or not. I suppose you would think that very much to be regretted, would n't you, Trottie? You would think it hardly respectable!"

Will laughed, and Trottie made a little petulant movement with one foot, as the Fairie glided past the first boat-house below the island.

"Anyhow you would be quite right, I think —" continued Will — "it is hardly respectable, success being the most perfectly respectable institution known to mankind. And in any case — it is very stupid and absurdly selfish for me to be boring you with my views, which are not views, on topics that don't come into your life, but upon which your expressions of opinion are very wise."

"Will, please don't talk like that; and — they do come into my life because they are yours. And I want you to succeed, so much that I pray every night for you and Robert to be great men. And I think what you say is beautiful, only — somehow, it does not sound as though it would do in the real world."

Poor little Trottie. There were so many things she wanted to say. So many thoughts floating about in her pretty head, inspired by her affection for the two brothers; but the thoughts would not "arrange themselves," as she said afterwards, and she could not tell Will about them. But Trottie looked all she felt, if she could not put it into words, and perhaps Will caught a glimpse of the warm sympathy in her eyes, for, as she paused and looked down on the rugs at her feet, he said, in a much gentler tone than that in which he had last spoken: —

"You are the best little sister in the world, Trottie, and considering what an unsatisfactory fellow I am, and that I don't even explain my want of ambition properly, it is wonderful that you take the smallest interest in my affairs. I 'm not ungrateful, Trottie, and I should like to explain if I could, though I don't care two straws what other people, outside you, choose to think. You see, when I hear of men being rising barristers who will become judges, promising young politicians who will become ministers, pushing men in commerce who will become the heads of great firms; it does not interest me in the least degree. I don't admire them, and I don't envy them; because I know they are giving themselves — their inside selves — to that little track, and if they are going to attain their end it means that that is all the grasp of their lives. I want to feel and see the lives of other men. I want to give them something, whether they give me anything or not. I want to breathe and feel the world

itself, not some one path across it, and to show some of it to others; and — Oh, I want to make something — create something, and leave it there for everybody. Do you understand me, Trottie?"

Will was leaning over the sculls towards his sister-cousin, and his face was glowing with an amount of nervous feeling the sympathetic girl had never before seen there. Love of force was part of Trottie's nature, and the expression on Will's face and the ring of his voice thrilled her.

"You have heard me speak of my friend Leonard Hinton, who left England just before I went to France," continued Will. Trottie nodded. "Well, Hinton left Oxford two months ago — he was only enabled to stay there by his scholarships — and he went to London. There is no one to plant Hinton down in a groove, and tell him to grub along to a certain point by hook or by crook; and he does not want to be planted. There are things Hinton hopes to make, and give to people. There are things in his mind now, and, later on, others will come there, when he has felt the beauty of them and breathed them into himself. Hinton has gone to London to write those first things. There is no one to help him, and he must earn a living somehow. He will do that by writing to order, — working for newspapers, — and meantime he will try to make the things he wants to leave. He will live his life, instead of working through a series of set phases. There is no particular point for him to reach or fall short of. He will

live all there is in him, in the world that is given us to live in. Leonard Hinton has chosen to be a writer, and, Trottie — "

"Oh, Will! Will! Look at the weir!"

A curious thing had happened. Will, in his position at the sculls, was of course facing away from the bow of the boat. Trottie had been looking at Will, and both had been sufficiently engrossed in the little outpouring of his mind which he had never indulged before, to be careless as to the direction taken by the boat, and oblivious to the steadily increasing roar of the water falling over Teddington weir. Now the boat was within a few feet of the weir-posts, between which the stream was tumbling into the reach below. In another two or three seconds the Fairie and its occupants, would also have been in that lower reach. But in three seconds much may be done. The boat was almost broadside on to the falling water, so with one flying look over his right shoulder, and without speaking, Will took a short stroke with his right scull, which almost snapped the supple wood in two, but was sufficient to send the Fairie's light bow whirling round in the rushing water. A stroke with both sculls made the row-locks creak ominously, and, her rudder actually jutting over the edge of the fall, the Fairie's quarter swung against one of the grassy weir-posts and the boat quivered like a live thing under the shock, as another couple of short strokes sent her shooting up-stream, and clear of a somewhat uncomfortable predicament.

Trottie on Worldly Success

Two minutes more, and the Fairie was lying in the opening to the boat-house on the lawn of The Elms — Trottie's home — and Will was apologising for his carelessness as he helped his cousin to step out of the boat.

On any other occasion the girl would rather have enjoyed such an incident, but, coming in a moment of nervous excitement, those few seconds by the weir-side, had upset bright little Trottie more than she would have cared to own.

"Oh, Will, it was all my fault for not looking." And then with a quivering little smile: "And it interrupted what you were telling me. But never mind. You are beautifully strong, Will, and — it was wonderful."

CHAPTER IX

MR. ROBERT DARLEY, M. P.

JAMES CUMMING was standing on the verandah outside the French windows of his drawing-room, when Will and Trottie came walking across the lawn from the boat-house. The Elms has one of the most beautiful of the many gardens that slope down to the banks of the Lower Thames, and as a rule, when the rich man stood looking out over his grounds, he felt fairly well pleased with himself and the world.

In Poplar, and in Battersea, gentlemen take pleasure in standing at their back-doors on Sunday mornings, and on summer evenings, to gaze over their back-yards, and at the clothes-lines in their neighbours' back-yards.

On this occasion, however, Mr. Cumming was not in an amiable frame of mind; and prim little Miss Lipston, who stood near him on the verandah, recognising this, herself assumed a look of mild disapproval, — a pale reflection of the wealthy man's scowl. Nothing very disastrous had happened; but James Cumming's gold chronometer told him that the time was five minutes to eight, when Trottie and her

cavalier arrived. Only five minutes to, and Trottie and Will were in boating attire. Like many another weak man, Trottie's father could see no shadow of excuse for the little failings of others, and waiting or delay in connection with a meal was a thing to him abhorrent.

"My dear!" said Miss Lipston, deprecatingly brushing aside with her thin fingers some of Trottie's most rebellious curls.

"I am surprised at your want of punctuality William,"—James Cumming was one of the very few who never called young Darley, Will. "Your lack of method in life is really very objectionable. I could guarantee that your brother Robert is dressed and waiting for the dinner-gong."

"No, Father," said Trottie. "Brother Robert is more pleasantly employed; he has gone away somewhere with the most artistic man in England, so he must be enjoying himself."

Will smiled, and, falling into his usual dreamy tone in speaking, apologised for having forgotten to look at his watch as they came down the river.

"My dear, you are quite flushed," said Miss Lipston to her charge, in the tone of one giving the news of a friend's dangerous illness.

"That 's because I 'm happy," said Trottie, brightly.

"And I declare your frock is splashed all over."

"That 's all part of the happiness, and because we tried to shoot the weir," rejoined the girl, laughingly.

"But do let me run away and dress, and we shall be only about ten minutes late."

Saying this as she tripped across the verandah, Trottie ran laughing into the house, and Will, following her, went up to his room to hurry through dressing for dinner.

"A sad madcap," remarked the colourless Miss Lipston, with a kindly ring in her voice, "but always penitent for her wrong-doing, and full of good resolutions."

"H'm, her penitence did not strike me as remarkable this evening, Miss Lipston; but I am glad you find her so. Personally I prefer punctuality to penitence." And Mr. Cumming smoothed his slightly rumpled shirt-front with one large hand, in a manner which suggested ruffled plumage; and turning then, he walked through one of the open windows to the drawing-room beyond.

After a week of the quiet, even life of the Elms, — a week which was pleasant to Trottie, who found Will's talk, if a little vague and dreamy, still, far more interesting than Miss Lipston's carefully prepared conversational efforts, — Will left for South Wales, where he was to spend the rest of the long vacation with a reading-party. But Trottie's life did not again resume its old unchanging round of mornings spent on the lawn with the dogs, or in riding with her groom, and afternoons in the Fairie listening to Miss Lipston's harmless platitudes, and watching that lady producing things of beauty and joy in crewel work. Robert was living in chambers in town now, and that

fact made a considerable difference in Trottie's life, — a change of which she hardly knew whether to be glad or otherwise. Robert generally came down to the Elms on Saturday night to remain till Monday, and frequently dined and spent an evening there during the week.

Now Trottie was always pleased to see Robert, and deeply interested in his clever talk of the life he was leading, and of the men he met in his study of political routine. But Robert generally brought Rollo Croft to spend his week ends at the Elms. Sometimes he brought one or two other friends, but rarely did he come down without the dark man whom Trottie had first seen on the tow-path at Kingston. The other visitors whom Robert introduced into the home-circle at the Elms, were men for the most part more or less connected with politics, whom James Cumming's extensive influence, and Robert's bright prospects, made quite willing to accept and reciprocate the latter's hospitality, whilst familiarising him with the atmosphere of the circle in which for the future he was to move.

These people Trottie found distinctly interesting, and they on their side were by no means averse to chatting with and amusing the pretty unconventional girl, who, despite her entire ignorance of the world they knew best, yet managed gracefully enough in her girlish way to share with the staid Miss Lipston the minor duties of a hostess. With Rollo Croft, however, it was different.

Regarding this man, whom very many of her sex pronounced delightful, Trottie certainly began with an unfavourable prejudice. This was strange, because, had she been asked which of her two brother-cousins had the largest share of her affection and regard, she would have replied in all candour that she loved them both, and one as much as the other. And Croft was Robert's "great" friend, and Will had told her she must not have a bad opinion of him; yet in her heart was a feeling she did not in the least understand, which, with the recollection of Will's hesitating remark of, "I don't know that I want you to like him, Trottie," made her inclined to hold the dark man very much at arm's length. It was an unacknowledged question of loyalty, and to one who could have seen it, would have formed an interesting feature in her character.

Acting on this feeling, Rollo Croft's somewhat strained humour, even his courtly attentions and the gentle deference which elsewhere gained for him many friends that were women,— all this rather jarred on Trottie, whilst in a certain way it drew admiration from her.

Like most mentally sensual and susceptible men, Rollo Croft believed that in matters of the heart he was blasé. In truth, he was not and never would be, and that this pretty school-girl of seventeen should keep him at arm's length as she did, piqued Robert's friend more than a little.

When the leaves of the creepers that trailed over

Trottie's boat-house were beginning to develop the ruddy crimson and gold which comes with early September, the Cumming household bade the river farewell for a time. The Fairie was placed, carefully and under Trottie's own supervision, in its winter quarters; and James Cumming, with his daughter, Miss Lipston, and Robert, left the Elms one sunshiny morning for Waterloo, *en route* to Bramwood. At the last moment Rollo Croft appeared at the door of the railway carriage reserved for the Cumming family, and presented Trottie with some flowers and magazines. He was pressed to join the party, but declined, promising, however, to run down to Bramwood on the following Friday evening.

"Exactly what one would have expected of Croft," said Robert, glancing at Trottie's flowers as the train steamed out of the station. "There are lots of men who never make mistakes; but Croft is a man who never makes an omission."

"They are beautiful," admitted Trottie, almost apologetically, as she sniffed daintily at the magnificent roses Croft had given her. A few minutes afterwards she placed them in the hat-rack, and a porter at Bramwood, finding them there later in the day, preserved them carefully in a can of water till he was off duty, and then carried them to his sweetheart, who accepted the tribute gratefully.

Bramwood Grange had been purchased by James Cumming's father during the boyhood of the former, from the last representative of a decayed county

family, and its beautiful park and carefully kept grounds, were the only things which, in Trottie's estimation, served to compensate in some measure for the absence of the river, and the temporary loss of boating.

As soon as the party had settled down, James Cumming began to issue invitations on a large scale to all Robert's political friends, the most influential of his own acquaintance, and members of various Hampshire families. It was decided that the Grange should be kept full of visitors until after the election had taken place. Mr. Cumming's sister, the wife of a manufacturing king in the North, came with her two daughters to spend several weeks, and to assist in doing the honours of the house, hospitality on a handsome scale having become the order of the day. Trottie, with her two cousins Maud and Hetty Venner, enjoyed the bustle of it all immensely, and her weekly letters to Will reached a brevity of almost telegraphic character as the date of the election drew nearer. The experience was such a novel one in Trottie's simple life, and even the attentions of Rollo Croft, who had taken up his abode at the Grange for an indefinite period, became pleasant when mingled with those of a score of others.

Robert himself was quite in his element during this exciting time; and James Cumming grew prouder than ever of his adopted son, as he noticed the favourable impression created among all those round him, by the young man's vigour and brilliancy.

Mr. Robert Darley, M. P.

The canvass of the district was of such a character as to call forth all that was strongest and most clever in Robert. The atmosphere of assured success was champagne to him, and his speeches sparkled under its influence.

The withdrawal of Captain Varney-Weyman from the Bramwood constituency, caused a London Radical Association to send into the district a candidate to oppose young Darley. But, as Rollo Croft put it, this "merely added piquancy to the situation," and redeemed it from its want of "caviarre." It was evident at once that the most the London man could hope to do was to pave the way to some extent for a future candidature in the Radical interest, and his canvass was simply regarded by the bulk of the Bramwood residents, with good-humoured tolerance.

Every morning Robert left the Grange with a party of friends who accompanied him to the various points in the district at which he delivered addresses; and the prestige of Bramwood Grange, the open-handedness of its representative, and the vigorous eloquence of the young candidate, ensured for him the most enthusiastic receptions on all sides. Trottie, with her cousins and other ladies of the house-party, joined Robert in many of these expeditions, and when, after young Darley's spirited addresses, votes of confidence were accorded him with all the unanimity which a hat-throwing rustic audience, liberally treated in the matter of liquor-supplies, can put into such things, Trottie's eyes would sparkle with en-

thusiasm, and her soft cheeks would glow with excitement and admiration. To her inexperience Robert became a hero and a great man, when he stood with his hand raised and a smile of confidence on his handsome face, trying to make himself heard above the babel of cheers which greeted his every speech.

There was nothing conducive to aggressiveness towards the opposition; and when Robert, driving a spanking team of grey coachers, and followed by half a dozen vehicles from the Grange stables, met the Radical candidate in his hired waggonette; — as in the streets of the little town he frequently did, — he would smilingly bow to his opponent, and greet him with all the easy courtesy of assured victory.

On the hustings, Robert delivered a speech which some of his political friends asserted would have placed him well up in the polling lists of a constituency in which he was unknown. He spoke after his one opponent, whose address was a plain declaration of policy; and, forsaking his notes at the end of the first few minutes, carried his audience with him for nearly three-quarters of an hour, in a manner which surprised himself and put James Cumming into an ecstasy of triumph.

Speaking to Rollo Croft in the smoking-room at the Grange that night when almost every one had retired to their rooms, an under-secretary who had come down to Bramwood in the Conservative interest to support Robert, said: —

"Darley made a devilish good speech, did he not?"

"Yes, I think it must have been good," said Croft; "because the crowd yelled so that I hardly heard a word. What sort of things did he say? What was it about?"

"Oh, he said, of course, that — well, he told them — the usual things, you know; and, now you mention it," said the under-secretary, "I really don't know anything he did say. But it was a good speech, devilish strong speech; and I think he will make a hit some day."

The month was a long series of successful functions of one kind and another, the whole district being swept along by the enthusiasm of the Grange party; and when, at last, the day of the poll arrived, it was more like the final gala of a month's carnival, than the time fixed for the last skirmish in a political campaign. The park and grounds of the Grange, and indeed the whole establishment, was thrown open to the people of the district from sunrise to sunset. Every vehicle and every horse the big stables could produce, was pressed into the service of those who conveyed voters to and fro. The landlord of the Grange Arms, probably from pure disinterestedness, kept open house, and from end to end the town of Bramwood seemed to be draped in the Darley colours.

For two days prior to the polling, a good deal of outside influence had been brought to bear in support of the Radical candidate, and a number of his friends, who took possession of one of the hotels in the town, made a valiant fight during the progress of the elec-

tion. This saved the polling day from tameness, and towards afternoon even introduced a certain element of anxiety into the work of the Grange party. But to most, the result was nevertheless a foregone conclusion, and when in the early evening the figures were declared at the polling station in Bramwood, they showed Robert Darley to have been elected member for the district, by what the "Bramwood Advertiser" naturally called "an overwhelming majority."

Robert took his victory gracefully, and sent a cordial invitation to the defeated candidate to dine at the Grange that night. This invitation was not accepted. But the evening was a none the less brilliant one, and the morning of the following day was far advanced, when Robert, with Rollo Croft and a few of their most intimate friends, wished each other good-night at the door of the smoking-room.

Several hours before this, Trottie had managed to draw Robert aside, and with characteristic enthusiasm, had offered her congratulations to "Mr. Robert Darley, M. P." In thanking her, Robert placed an envelope in her hand, and whispered, as he hurried away: —

"Here 's Will's message, Trottie. There 's half a hundred in a basket on the hall table; but I thought you might like to read Will's."

In the novel excitement of the month which had just ended, Trottie had thought very little of Will. So it happened that when, sitting at the open window of her pretty bedroom, long after midnight, she looked

at the thin envelope containing Will's telegram to his brother, a penitent feeling of self-reproach passed over her heart, and even brought tears to her eyes as she read the message.

It ran thus: "Sincerest congratulations, old chap. Your success brilliant enough for us both. May it be first of many as well won. WILL."

Trottie, a quivery smile, half excitement, half sadness, playing on her lips, folded the tissue sheet, and, returning it to its envelope, whispered as she somewhat wearily rose from her chair: —

"Dear old Will! I wish — No, I don't wish it were you, a bit."

Then Trottie knelt down to say her prayers.

CHAPTER X

THE GREY HOUR

"AND now that you have become a fully-fledged legislator, your immediate programme, I suppose—"

"Is work, old man; back to my chambers and work," said Robert, interrupting his friend Croft's characteristically languid diction with a full-flavoured whiff of his own exhilaration. "You see, Croft, at this end of the century, at all events, a politician can't jump through any royal entrance to fame, though he possess the combined talents of a Disraeli and a Gladstone. He must prove himself a willing horse in the training track."

The time was afternoon on the day following the election, and Robert Darley and Rollo Croft were lying back in opposite corners of a first-class smoking carriage, in the train which had just left Bramwood for London. In Robert's voice was still the ring of his speech of thanks for congratulations on his election.

"You're a wonderful fellow," said the artist; "and apparently as full of energy as though the election were still a thing to be decided."

"The election is only the preliminary canter; and I 'm entered to win, and backing myself."

Croft smiled as, declining his friend's proffered cigar, he lit a Turkish cigarette. "Yes," he assented, "you look as though you were doing something beastly aggressive."

"The survival of the fittest, my friend, means really the survival of the aggressive."

"Does it? By Jove! I 've often wondered, when waiting for a train, or being shaved, what that absurd phrase meant. I thought it was something to do with produce and markets, and things they label perishable."

"Exactly. We 're all perishable, and those of us who are kept too long — from success — get high — wilt — go to the wall."

"That sounds ridiculously like a statement of fact."

"Deals with facts, old man; success and failure. My choice is for the former."

"Your views of success, like all views, are weird things, Robert. To me they suggest simply heavy boots and pork. However, I think you 're a little feverish. The tension of this last month has been much greater than you think, and I fancy you 'll feel its effects."

"You talk like a book, Rollo."

"Heaven forfend! It 's your awful electioneering atmosphere."

And then the two men were silent for a while.

Middle Greyness

During the past month Rollo Croft had been little more to the young member than any of his other friends, because circumstances had prevented any direct, uninterrupted contact between them before this afternoon, when they were proceeding together to town. Robert was much more exhausted by his carouse of success than he knew, and in the atmosphere of careless languor which always pervaded his artist friend, he relapsed visibly. For almost an hour he slept in the train, whilst Croft sat smoking and watching his friend with an amused light of banter in his dark eyes. Then as the train drew near London, Robert woke, and Croft said: —

"I suppose you 'll come out to The Odalisque with me to-night?" The Odalisque was the name of the artist's beautiful little house in West Kensington.

"Oh, dear, no, old man," replied Robert, with eager emphasis, which caused Croft's eyebrows to rise. "Must go straight to my own place. Deuced hard work for me now, and — better to begin well, you know — er — eh?"

Robert's eyes were fixed on those of his friend, and the end of his sentence was to its beginning as a volley of pop-guns to a salvo of cannon.

"Oh, but you are painfully in earnest, Robert mine! Do you begin prime-ministering this evening?"

"No, but you see — What do you intend doing this evening, Rollo?"

"I? Oh, this is to be one of my purple-and-kyok

blossom nights, — a Burgundy rather than a Neirsteiner evening. Bèté 's arranged for dinner at the Coliseum; a look in at a ballet somewhere; supper at The Castanets; an hour or two afterwards at Gabelle's menagerie; and — er — the soft lights at The Odalisque. There you have my programme. It 's a wicked thing to make arrangements, I know; but — I thought I must fill my lungs with something after this genial month, so — "

" Ah! Yes, well, I must go right into work," said Robert, slowly. And two minutes afterwards the train steamed into its London terminus.

Croft's cab was waiting for him outside the station; but Robert had omitted to telegraph to his man, an intuitive genius to whom instructions were a mere form, and as a matter of fact generally unnecessary.

" Well, I suppose I shall at some future period have the pleasure of meeting you again," said Croft, with a smile, as he held out his hand to wish his friend " Good-bye." " Even if I have to wait till you 're a prime minister, or — wilted, or something. Usual messages to Bèté, I suppose? Good-bye, old man! ".

" Good-bye, Rollo — er — I say, look here! Hang it — Tell your man to take my bag. I 'll come with you. I have n't tasted caviarre for a month, and — Well, I 've been elected, have n't I? "

" You have, indeed, inconsequence most admirable; and what 's more, I believe your reason 's returning, or glimmerings of it." Croft turned to his servant.

Middle Greyness

"Take Mr. Darley's bag, Norton, and — have it brought on, with the other things, to Kensington."

Seven hours afterwards, Robert Darley's health was being drunk in vases of Burgundy, as a wind-up to a late supper. Suppers at The Castanets are usually protracted affairs; but there were very few occupied tables in the great Moorish hall, when Robert's health was drunk; though, considered as one of Robert's "purple-and-kyok blossom" phases, the night was yet young.

Said Bèté to Robert's vis-á-vis: "Just fancy, and, after that awful month, Mr. Darley meant to have started some stupid politics, or something, this evening, and would have done, I believe, but for Rollo."

"Ah!"

"No, to do him justice," said Croft, smiling over the table at Robert. "I don't think he would have gone through with his hideous project. Criminality is one thing in theory, and quite another in — "

"Of course," broke in Robert. And, considering the early period of the evening, which was not a "Neirsteiner evening," his eyes were wonderfully bright, and his face very flushed, — "Bèté, you, at least, should not forget that I am a creature of phases. I could never stand continuity in caviarre, like Rollo. I take it in sandwiches with — er — cold mutton and politics. I am essentially a creature of phases, and this — "

"Is his lucid interval," exclaimed Rollo. "Long may it what-d'ye-call-it. I say, you people, we really must move if we are to drop in at Gabelle's,

and I understand that they are particularly Byzantine just now."

So a move was made to an atmosphere of richer tones, heavier perfumes, stronger pressure.

Between six and seven in the morning, the two men lighted cigarettes in a quaintly beautiful sanctum at The Odalisque; and a servant entered the room with black coffee.

"Robert of me," said the artist to Darley, "after so divinely Moorish an evening, I think we will take our coffee in the conservatory. A glass house is the only possible place in which to drink sunrise black coffee. Come!"

Rollo Croft was calm, and at his best. Robert Darley's face had been flushed in an ugly way, but at this time the flush was fading out, leaving only ashen greyness, sparsely streaked. He followed Croft, somewhat shakily, to the conservatory, on the threshold of which he met a full flood wave, into which no purple had yet crept, of cold, grey dawn. The man raised one hand to his eyes, and a shiver ran over him.

"Great heavens, Rollo! Does nothing affect you?" he muttered, drawing back as he spoke into the shadow of the room out of which the conservatory opened.

"Nothing affect me! Is there anything that does not? This early light permeates me with its beauty. Come out here, old man, you don't get the benefit of it there."

"Beauty — God it makes me — freezes me! Rollo, I must go to my own chambers."

"My dear fellow, what in the world are you talking about? People don't go out at this time. Even a politician would hesitate — Well, it simply is n't done. What 's the matter? "

"Rollo, you don't seem to understand. You never will understand me. My life cannot be a long unbroken joke like yours. I have to succeed; I — "

"Good gracious, I 'd no notion of your grey hour having arrived. It 's a most inconvenient peculiarity, that of yours, and would get on the nerves of any man but me. Don't deluge me with it, there 's a good fellow. Grey hours don't enter into my life; they 're too ugly."

"My dear Rollo," began Robert, wearily, — his lips were white now, and his face looked very garish, — "I can't understand your way of looking at things. I must work, and work hard; be aggressive, as you call it. This sort of thing kills me. I must forego caviarre till success gives me a safe atmosphere for its enjoyment. I must."

"For mercy's sake, Robert, don't be so painfully serious! You are simply ruining for me this beautiful pale effect. And — pardon my saying so — if you will persist in the Gothic practice of making resolutions, why in the world should you always pour them over me? What have I done? Just look at that heliotrope wave over the elms; is n't it perfect? "

"Rollo, you will drive me mad."

"And you don't appreciate the beauty of madness," murmured Croft.

"Don't you see that all this is simply poison to me, now? I want power and success, and I will have them. Well, to win them I must—"

"My dear Robert, as your friend I can take many things from you; but I must protest, I will not have this Methodistical grey hour of yours forced into me."

The artist's small hands were raised, their palms turned towards his friend, as though to shut out the contact with his personality.

"I would advise your going up to bed," he continued. "There are obligations which— But, however, this is apparently the greyest of your grey hours. I can't bear it; it 's too ugly. If you really want to be grey in your own rooms, let me send you in my cab."

"Rollo, you are very pitiless at times."

"I— pitiless?— Good heavens!"

Robert lowered his hand from the curtain it had held tremblingly to steady him, and said, "Yes, I will go, Rollo. Good-morning."

"Good-night, old chap! Norton will see about the cab, and you 'll excuse my not coming out now, won't you? Seeing people off always jars on me, and this sky is— Well, good-night!"

So Robert drove to his chambers off Pall Mall, and a few hours afterwards was thrashing up and down his study, during the preparation of a speech to be delivered at a political dinner in Hampshire.

CHAPTER XI

BUDDING

THOUGH the majority of Robert's friends, and the men who had come from London to support his canvass at Bramwood, left the Grange immediately after the election, the exodus from that hospitable establishment was by no means general. Mrs. Venner, with her two daughters, continued to reign over the drawing-room of Trottie's home, when the trees in the park, and the trailing plants in the fine old garden, had exchanged their gold-and-crimson beauty for the dank bareness of late November.

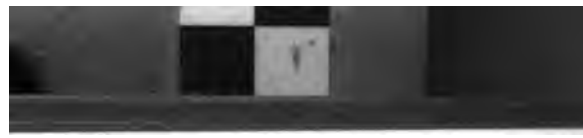
Robert was being introduced to politics. Trottie was gaining her first glimpse of such portions of the little world of society as may be seen from a millionaire's country house. So far she liked it. Of society in the strictly conventional sense of the word, and as seen during the height of a London season, Trottie knew nothing. But the Grange, under Mrs. Venner's skilful management, with frequent dinner parties, organised programmes of daytime amusement, and a score of guests within its walls, was in itself a novel thing to Trottie, during whose life up to this period

there had been practically no entertaining in James Cumming's establishments.

"I cannot think why in the world you always look so bored and indifferent," she said to Maud Venner, who was only two years her senior. "I find it awfully good fun myself; and since one cannot do any boating in the winter, I am really immensely grateful to Robert, for being a member and all that, you know; because if it had not been for the election, we should have dawdled through the winter here alone, and on wet days it would have been awful."

In early December Trottie had a little taste of what her previous winters had been, the Grange being left almost deserted, and even Mrs. Venner leaving for the North. James Cumming had, however, determined to keep Christmas up in the old style. He arranged that his sister, Mrs. Venner, with her daughters and her husband, should return to the Grange for Christmas week, his sister again acting as hostess. Robert was to bring with him, for the holidays, a large contingent of his London friends; the county would contribute its share towards those who were to take part in the general festivities; and, at Trottie's special request, Will had induced his friend Leonard Hinton to be one of the party for this last week of a year which had been an awakening for Trottie, and an entrance into the business of his life for Robert.

Everything passed off well that Christmas, and Trottie enjoyed the little burst of gaiety immensely.



Her life just then was a series of new impressions, and not the least pleasant of these came from her meeting with Will's friend. He spoke to her of a life different from that Will had shown her, in that it was one of action, instead of a life of dreaming merely. Yet, speaking as one who had felt and acted as well as thought, Leonard Hinton gave her a casual insight into a sphere as far removed from that which Robert's brilliant cleverness had shown her, as her own wayward girlish life had been from either.

In the springtime came another new impression in the shape of a fortnight in the full swing of London's season, spent with the Venners at their house in Mayfair. The effect of this upon Trottie was something she did not understand, but she was not sorry when the end of the fortnight came. The inexorable round of daily functions passed through by the Venner's town household, weighed simple Trottie down with a sense of the weariness of things. There seemed too much Rollo Croft in it, and she woke in the mornings of that fortnight with hungry longings for a seat on a heap of rugs in the Fairie, and a sunny afternoon below Sunbury with Will and Robert.

"Robert," said Trottie to the young politician, as he sat next her at dinner on the night before the Cumming party left for the Continent — the time had arrived for their spring visit to the Riviera — "Robert, I want you to promise me something."

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"Anything short of murder or the proposing of some one's health, will I most gladly promise, sister mine. Do you want an African panther to tame in the Riviera, or do you merely wish that I should take a class at Sunday-school for the rest of the season?"

Robert looked smilingly into Trottie's pretty face as he made his gallant suggestions, and the girl felt that these were the things, trivial as they seemed, which gave Robert much of his strength. Of course the words he spoke were nothing; but when he looked into her face with such perfect frankness, and smiled in his own assured way, Trottie felt herself his for the time, to influence as he might choose. Instinctively she admired him for this, this faculty of assuming something which if not in itself strength and success, then, at least in some men, is so nearly allied to both as to achieve the ends of either.

Trottie smiled in reply to Robert's banter, and said; "No; but seriously, Robert, panthers and Sunday-schools aside, I want you to promise that every now and then while you are — while you are becoming prime minister, you know, you will come down to the Elms, and go out in the Fairie with me for an afternoon; row me to Sunbury and drift back, and — wear flannel things and a straw hat. Will you promise, Robert?"

"By Jove, you are a dear little sister, Trottie mine! I will. I hereby solemnly pledge myself to do this thing, though I have to wade through seas of gore and spend fortunes in cab-fares to do it. And

—thank you, Trottie. Don't you be afraid; I will not forget."

And as he spoke, Robert's pupils contracted, and his eyes seemed to be looking inward and backward, with a pained, weary expression as of one who, gazing into his own soul, sees there a picture which is ugly. It may have been the interior of Rollo Croft's conservatory which Robert saw, in the pale, nacreous light of early dawn.

Robert Darley's entrance into political life was a very different thing to that of the young member who, with his election papers as his recommendation, and a local paper's leading article as his introduction, comes to Westminster to win his spurs on his merits. Robert began his career as a member with the prestige of a man whose candidature had been supported by a minister and two of the most powerful speakers in the House of Commons. At his back was one practically certain constituency, and great influence in several others. He took his seat in the House as a young man known to have command of very great wealth, who had passed through a quite exceptional Oxford career, and had created a strong impression by the eloquence of several speeches made at London political gatherings. For some years his name had been on the books of the Carlton Club, and, almost immediately after his election to Parliament, a little pressure from quarters in which James Cumming's good will was valuable, made him a full fledged member of London's great Conservative social head-quarters.

Budding

In addition to all this, he was already favourably known to the best men of his party, and these various influences combined, served to create an atmosphere of power, confidence, and success which, whilst admirably adapted to bringing out all that was most striking and forcible in Robert's character, also made his début in the arena of politics as brilliant as the promise it gave was hopeful.

"He is just a little bit erratic — seeming to pull back in the collar sometimes, like a colt not sure of his strength, but that will wear off, and may be merely nervousness; and the phases of really splendid pacing are so very much more pronounced than the interludes of jibbing tendencies, that really the latter are hardly worth considering in looking at his record." So James Cumming, in the Riviera, read of Robert, his son, in a long letter from an astute politician and friend of his in London. And the reading of this impartial criticism helped to make the Riviera a pleasanter spot than usual to Mr. Cumming.

A student of human nature would have been fascinated by a study of Trottie's life in Southern France during the spring of this year. So perfect an example was it of pure young life taking breath between sips and gulps of learning, glimmerings of knowledge, of the world that lay before it; that even James Cumming, matter-of-fact and unsympathetic as he was, in the negative weakness of his nature, yet was impressed by the beauty of this budding process in his daughter's life. And this, notwithstanding the fact that as a rule

he took practically no notice of her whatever, beyond what the ordinary courtesies of life demanded.

Strolling onto the balcony of the villa he had rented at Beaulieu, one sunshiny morning shortly before their return to England, James Cumming found his daughter standing gazing across the beautiful stretch of woodland which lies between Beaulieu and Nice. She was dressed in a plain white gown of muslin, with soft waves of creamy lace rising and falling in the morning breeze, round her dainty throat. One little hand shaded her eyes, and the other, resting on the creeper-covered balustrade of the balcony, supported her figure as she leaned forward. On her lips was a smile of pure delight, and in her soft eyes shone a light of unrestrained happiness, childish almost, in its perfect trustfulness.

James Cumming despised poetry, and his thoughts were essentially mundane. Catching, as he stepped along the balcony, the full light of Trottie's gaze into the sunshine, the expression which almost escaped his lips, was, "Who the devil is she looking at?"

A hasty glance down the valley, however, showed him that no solitary man or woman was in sight. And then a tiny ray of the beauty of it all penetrated the outer shell of the man's mind, and he stroked the girl's shoulder clumsily, with one of his big white hands.

"So you like the Riviera, Madcap, do you?"

Trottie started. She had never in her life before heard such an expression from her father. But turning round she kissed him timidly, as she said "Oh, it's

all so beautiful, Father! All the world; don't you think so?"

Her father smiled good-humouredly and lit a cigar.

"But I shall be glad to see the dear old Elms again, Father, and the dogs, and the river. Oh, I shall be glad to see the river and the Fairie again."

Mr. Cumming settled himself in his lounge chair. "Yes, child. But you don't want to miss the carnival on Friday, and on Sunday we are due at the Marsdens' picnic on the lake. We shall leave here on Tuesday, and on Thursday I have asked Robert to bring Mr. Croft and one or two of his friends down to dinner at the Elms. So you will have your river soon enough, eh?"

"Yes, of course, Father; and — anyhow it is all very beautiful, and I am very happy."

So, somewhat to the relief of the worthy Miss Lipston, — there was much in the easy-going life of the Riviera which did not harmonise perfectly with Miss Lipston's ideas of a devout and proper life, — Mr. Cumming and his daughter left Beaulieu on the day the former had mentioned, and proceeded by easy stages to London. Trottie was charmed with everything, and very happy to reach her old summer quarters, to feel again the warm hush of the river, and the tenderness of the willows by the boat-house where the Fairie lay. Robert, of course, had much to tell of his London life, his work on Parliamentary committees, and the many incidents that are crowded into the daily routine of a hard-working young mem-

ber's life. Much which Robert did not tell, Rollo Croft and other friends did, of the power the young politician was gaining, of the impression he made upon his own set in the House, and of the certainty that existed of his becoming a man of note.

Once during the summer, Robert went to Paris for a week with Rollo Croft, and when he came back there was something in his voice and expression which puzzled Trottie, and made her think vaguely of Will's remarks about his feeling towards Rollo Croft. With this in her mind, she said to her cousin as he left the Elms on the second morning after his return from Paris: —

"Robert, you have not forgotten the promise which was not about panthers and Sunday-schools, have you?"

"Why, no, little girl," replied Robert, lightly. "Do I not come down often enough? I must work, you know."

"Yes, I know, only — don't ever forget, Robert."

And then Trottie half reproached herself for worrying her cousin, for his face was haggard, and he had explained that he had not been well in Paris.

So the year wore on, and, in July, Will came home for a while. Then Trottie revelled in deep draughts of the summer's beauty, whilst sitting dreaming and listening to Will's talk in the Fairie.

James Cumming spent a quieter winter that year than the last had been; but the life at the Grange, during the months preceding and following Christmas, was by no means a dull one. Trottie's father was in-

tensely interested in the study of Robert's progress towards success, and did not at any time raise any objection to the — at times — remarkable expense which attended the town life of his adopted son.

When spring came again, Rollo Croft and Robert both spent a week with the Cumming household at Beaulieu, prior to their return for another summer at the Elms. Trottie was nineteen now, and the past year, whilst not removing the unconventionality of her girlhood, in some way seemed to have draped and beautified and softened it, with a grace of womanhood which shone from out her frank brown eyes, and showed in every line of her supple form.

On a bright morning in the early June of this year, Trottie said to her father at the breakfast-table, "Will is coming to-day, Father."

"Why, bless my soul, so he is!" said James Cumming, lowering his paper as he spoke. "I had really forgotten all about it."

"You don't mind my driving Bess in the dog-cart to meet Will at the station, do you, Father?" said Trottie, as she rose from the table.

"Eh? Oh, no; drive what horse you like, child. And Will is coming home from Oxford for good. Well, upon my word, I had entirely forgotten the circumstance. I wonder now —"

And Mr. Cumming went out onto the lawn to share his wonder with a cigar in the sunshine.

CHAPTER XII

AN AFTER-DINNER STORY

OUTSIDE the station Trottie sat in the dog-cart, waiting, and talking to Bess, the bay mare. Inside the station, the smart little groom who in the Elms establishment was answerable for his actions to Trottie, and Trottie only, waited for the train in which Will Darley was to arrive from London, where he had spent the night of the day on which he bade farewell to college life.

It was an ideal June morning; and, perched on the high seat of the dog-cart, Trottie looked, as Will shortly afterwards told her, "so distinctly Trottie, that any qualifying adjective would have been odious."

At last the train came snorting into the quiet little station; whereupon Bess, the bay mare, promptly showed her disapproval of locomotives as an institution, by endeavouring vainly to climb through her own collar. Then Will came swinging out through the booking-office door, looking strong and wiry in his rough tweeds, straw hat, and boots of tan.

"Well, little Trottie! By Jove, how well, and — grown-up you are looking! I? Oh, yes! I've been

doing a little river work, and I always get brown as soon as summer comes."

"Yes, you look well and strong, and awfully nice, Will dear; but you are much thinner than when I saw you at Christmas. I believe you've been working too hard."

"Oh, bless you, no; I don't work half hard enough, Trottie. You know how lazy I have always been. But certainly I have done rather more than last year, and am all the better for it."

So the brother and sister — who were not brother and sister — met again and were very pleased to see each other. At Will's request, Trottie drove home the long way, — through the park, — and the two compared notes, during the bay mare's lucid intervals, on their experiences of the last few months. Will learned of those of Robert's latest successes which had not been communicated by letter, and Trottie heard of Will's recent doings, and of Leonard Hinton's work in the world of Fleet Street.

Will's face had still much of the old dreamy look which made his eyes suggest a view of things in the distance, not discernible to ordinary mortals; but his tone in speaking was far less languid, and his every sentence more terse and decisive, than when he and Trottie had been last together. Trottie's mother-wit and quick perception told her of this change in Will before he had been five minutes in the dog-cart; and loving strength as she did, the discovery pleased her greatly. There was one question she had wanted to

ask him directly after their meeting; but it was not an easy question, and only when the two had dismounted from the dog-cart, and were passing through the hall of the Elms to look for Mr. Cumming, did Trottie ask it. Then she said: —

"Will, have you made up your mind what — which groove you are going into?"

Will paused with his hand on the door of James Cumming's sanctum, and smiled at his questioner. "I have made up my mind on that subject," he said, slowly; "but I think we 'll talk about it afterwards, Troddles, in the Fairie. Would n't that be nicer?"

Trottie nodded assent, and, turning, walked towards the wide old staircase, as Will stepped into Mr. Cumming's room, to greet the man at whose expense he had been brought up.

James Cumming welcomed his adopted son with no pretence at any display of warmth he did not feel. That was a feature of his character which an unkind critic might have called mere absence of consideration for the feelings of others, but which an impartial student of men would have attributed to frankness. He never pretended to be actuated in anything by any feeling which he did not really possess.

There were several reasons, just then, which tended to prevent any feeling of warmth towards Will in James Cumming's heart. One was that years previously he had made up his mind that Robert was possessed of those qualities which make real success possible, and that Will was not. Another was that

Will's openly expressed hatred of that orthodoxy which condemns heterodoxy because it is heterodox, reminded Mr. Cumming strongly of the contempt which the young man's father had expressed for what he had called James Cumming's "colourlessness."

There were many other reasons which, more during the last two years than ever, had caused James Cumming to practically ignore Will, and in his own mind entirely to disassociate the younger brother from the older. Perhaps the whole might have been summed up by saying, that in his adoption of the Darley brothers the millionaire had been actuated solely by a desire to himself mould their young lives, and force one or both to the success which the greatest disappointment of his life had prevented his giving to a son of his own flesh and blood. He regarded Robert as a young man who would reach this end; because Robert had shown himself willing to bid for it on lines laid down by him, James Cumming. He regarded Will as one who would never do anything in the world, partly because he did not in the least degree comprehend that young man's nature, and partly because Will did not accept his adopted father's view of things, as the natural guiding lights of his own life.

So it happened that the words with which he greeted Will were: "Ah, Will, so you are home again, and have left college for good, eh? How are you?"

And for the rest of the day a strained and nervous atmosphere pervaded the house, suggesting forebodings of trouble and change. This chilled Trottie, forcing

laughter back from her lips, and gaiety from her sensitive heart. In the evening Robert came down to the Elms alone, a thing in itself startlingly unusual. Trottie had never noticed quite so serious an expression on the older brother's face, as she saw there on this June evening; and as the small party of four — Miss Lipston was away on a visit in the country — sat down to dinner, Trottie said, with a ghost of a smile on her lips: —

"Robert, I am sure you must be getting very near the prime minister's chair, or whatever he sits on. I never saw you look so fearfully political. Please don't forget the panther-and-Sunday-school promise."

This remark created a slight diversion; because Will, apparently the only member of the party really at his ease, wanted to know the history of the "panther-and-Sunday-school promise." This told, however, Will's self-possession would not save the meal from being a dull and heavy episode, in a day which, beginning, to Trottie at all events, in bright sunshine, had grown more sombre and shadowy with every hour that passed. This being so, it was a relief to the girl to hear James Cumming say in his most ponderous style: —

"Charlotte, I think you would prefer to leave us now. I wish to talk to Robert and William, and will take coffee here."

"Charlotte" — her father reserved to himself the right no one else cared to claim, of frequently calling his daughter by her real name — Charlotte looked

across the room to Will, whilst Robert, being on that side of the table, held the door open for her; and Will smiled, actually smiled, in an atmosphere which had almost choked poor Trottie. But that smile was good and strong, and Trottie walked into the empty drawing-room feeling somewhat comforted, and with a heart full of tender affection for Will, with all his vagueness and unconventionality.

"Both you, Robert, and you, Will," began James Cumming immediately after Trottie had left the room, "are aware that I am not actually your father; though I have endeavoured to always act as father to you both, and you have addressed me and regarded me as your father."

The two young men bowed, and the last flickering remains of Will's smile died away.

"Now," continued the head of the house, "I do not wish in any way to hurt your feelings in this matter; but you know that my habit is to speak plainly. Therefore, do not think my motive unkindly in what I am going to tell you. Your father was unfortunately a weak man who affected to despise" — here Mr. Cumming turned his eyes towards the younger brother — "to despise the fundamental principles acknowledged to be the proper ones for the guidance of life. The result of this was natural, though deplorable; and your father, guided and restrained by no regard for the recognised standards of — er — respectability, drifted from bad to worse. Then came a period of disgrace and shame upon which I would

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rather not touch. This was followed by your mother's death, and your father's realising the necessity for his disappearing from that sphere of life in which he had been accustomed to move. In realising this —"

Mr. Cumming hesitated for a moment, and, holding his glass to the light — an action instinctively allied in the minds of many to reminiscences of all kinds — drained it before continuing.

"In seeing this, your father also acknowledged to himself that he had not the strength of mind necessary to make a stoppage in his downward career possible, and that therefore his continued connection with his two sons — you were both very young children then — could only ruin both their lives. I offered to take you in hand, bring you up to manhood myself, and mould your lives on plans which I would formulate with a view to ensuring the ultimate achievement of success. This was, of course, on condition that your father should in no way interfere with your proper bringing up. This he — this offer he naturally accepted, and leaving you, his sons, in my hands, he disappeared utterly, and has never been heard of since. I have every reason now to suppose that his life has long since ended; and I think you will both agree with me that I have nothing to reproach myself about, in the matter of faithfulness to my trust."

Again the young men bowed, and, after a slight pause, James Cumming continued: "Long ago I decided in my own mind as to the course in which each of you could most surely achieve success. You,

An After-dinner Story

Robert," —the rich man looked at the elder of his adopted sons, — "I am pleased to say, have so far fallen in with all my plans and suggestions, and I think I may fairly say that you are well launched on a path which must lead you to success, and, I hope, to high standing. I confess that you, Will, have disappointed me very keenly, and particularly during these last two years in which your brother's progress has been so marked. I say it without bitterness; but, throughout your college life especially, you have shown more inclination to dream and drift indefinitely than to bend your mind toward any particular course in life. The rules I have endeavoured to make the guiding lines upon which you might win a position for yourself, have been treated by you with indifference and almost with contempt; and, despite the fact that no expense has been spared in the matter of your education, you have chosen to let all things remain matters of chance, and to prefer the chapter of accidents, to any plans my experience might suggest."

Will's lips parted, and he was evidently about to speak. But, with a wave of his white hand, James Cumming swept on in heavy fluency, as one who, having certain things to impart, meant to say on to the end before stopping. Will leaned back in his chair, toying thoughtfully with his coffee cup.

"I say all this," continued Mr. Cumming, "without the smallest desire to reproach or to reprove, but merely to make our position perfectly clear. I was desirous, from the beginning, of doing my best for you

both. Robert, acting upon my plans, has entered a career in which, with my influence behind him, he is, I believe, content to continue and certain to succeed. If I am wrong he will correct me."

Robert remained silent, but, without looking up, inclined his head slightly.

"You, Will, in contradiction of your past attitude, may now be prepared to fall in with my suggestions. I hope you will. At all events, I make them in the same spirit that I planned your brother's start in life, and without considering all that which in the last few years has shown a feeling of indifference in you never exhibited by Robert. Also, I have brought you up to man's estate, in fulfilment of my promise made to your father long ago, and — "

"For that I am sincerely grateful, sir."

This was, perhaps, the most dutiful speech Will had ever delivered. It was the first remark either of the young men had made since Mr. Cumming began to speak; and the latter's eyes, meeting Will's at the moment of its utterance, not as father looking at adopted son, or benefactor at protégé, but as one man looking at another, both recognised, on the instant, that whatever else circumstances might cause to follow, the matter in hand was finally settled, then and forever. The pause which followed was not a restful one, and James Cumming's eloquence was broken.

"The suggestion — the offer I have to make to you now," he continued, "is, that you at once enter upon the only career in which I see a possibility of your achiev-

ing success. You know that I still draw a portion of my income from the commercial house founded by my father. I now propose, that, entering the counting-house of that firm, you should work steadily through the routine which will fit you to become, in the course of time, a partner in one of the most important mercantile houses in London. That is a path in which it appears to me you may gain position and power. Therefore I offer it to you, and should you fail to — should you not fall in with this, there is nothing left for me to propose."

Again the rich man demanded silence with a wave of his hand, as Will began to speak.

"I do not wish to force a hasty reply," he said, "and will not hear or say any more in the matter to-night. To-morrow morning, if you will see me in my room before luncheon, I shall be glad to hear anything you have to say to me." Here Mr. Cumming rose from his chair. "And for the present, I will wish you both good-night."

So, with head thrown back, James Cumming walked heavily out of the room, and left the two sons of the man who, twenty years ago, had called him "colourless," alone together.

Robert rose, and, walking round to the other side of the table, placed his hand on his brother's shoulder. "You will, of course — "

"Do the best thing," broke in Will. "Yes, old chap. Good-night."

And then Robert was left alone in the dining-room.

Middle Greyness

He took a decanter from a liqueur-stand on the table, and, pouring out some cognac, drank it quickly. Then he filled the glass again and emptied it, this time slowly. Then he lit a cigarette and strolled out of the room, murmuring, as he walked: —

"By Gad, I wonder if the end is really worth it all!"

CHAPTER XIII

TAKING ACTION

WALKING slowly downstairs to breakfast on the morning following James Cumming's little after-dinner oration, Will met Trottie, and, taking both her hands in his, kissed her forehead as he wished her good-morning, a custom religiously observed by both the brothers. On this occasion Will greeted Trottie smilingly; but whilst he still held her hands, the smile died out of his face, and the girl's ready sympathy made her notice the old drooping at the corners of his mouth, which had saddened her one evening two years before. She could see the effort with which he forced a little brightness into his voice as he said: —

"There are not many men who have such a dear little sister as mine; and — you will never change to me, will you, Troddles?"

It was not a dignified appellative by which to address a graceful young woman of nineteen, and Trottie might have resented its use. She did not, however, and all the woman in her shone out of her eyes, as she said: —

"Will, of course not!" Then she drew herself up almost stiffly by way of asserting her calm self-possession.

"Trottie, I want you to take me out in the Fairie this afternoon; will you?" Will put the question earnestly, and Trottie, nodding abrupt consent, turned and flew up the stairs like a startled fawn.

Five minutes afterwards the little party were assembled at the breakfast-table, and Trottie was taking part in a vigorously maintained discussion on the subject of river carnivals and boat decorations. Breakfast over, Will and Robert strolled down the garden together to smoke and talk by the river; and Mr. Cumming took his newspaper and morning cigar on the verandah facing the lawn. Robert told his brother a good deal about the details of his life in Parliament, but did not venture to touch upon the subject which each knew was uppermost in the other's mind.

During the past three years Robert's ambition and determination to gain fame and power, had been the ruling motive of his life. From the day that this spirit took possession of him, he had known that, standing between his brother and his adopted father, as he did, he could not be in perfect touch and sympathy with both. Losing touch with James Cumming meant losing touch with wealth and the probabilities of success. Seeing this with calm, wide-open eyes, Robert Darley had chosen to forego sentiment, and lose touch with his brother, rather than to forego

power, and lose touch with wealth and his adopted father. And Robert knew that his brother knew of this. So, apart from the fact that his nature contained few chords responding to any key-note in Will's character, there was a distinct line between the two, a gulf which brotherly affection could not bridge, or conventionality hide from either of the young men themselves.

Shortly before noon, the two parted at the garden-gate, Robert starting for town, and Will preparing to interview James Cumming.

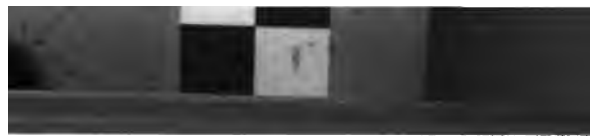
"Good-bye, Will, old man!" said Robert, as he stepped into the waiting dog-cart.

"No, no. Auf wiedersehn!" replied Will; "and — Robert, you were meant by Nature to succeed, and you will succeed; but take my advice, old man, and if you must give all your head to Westminster, keep your heart, or part of it, for yourself, if only because you may want to give it away before you are prime minister. Till our next meeting then, and that 's sure to be soon!"

So Robert drove off towards the station. And Will walked to the door of James Cumming's room, and was invited by that gentleman to make himself comfortable.

"I am sure you have no more desire than I to dwell long on this subject, William;" said Trottie's father, "so let us — er —"

"Come to the point?" suggested Will, with a faint smile.



"Exactly," Mr. Cumming nodded slowly; and Will said: —

"Well, I cannot help feeling that we understand each other pretty well now; but, all the same, there are one or two things I should be very sorry not to speak of. First of all, I want to say that whatever impression to the contrary my attitude may have given, I am not, and never shall be, ungrateful to you for the part of my life which has been dependent on you. I thank you very much, and am very grateful for all you have done for me. Also, I am sorry for anything in my behaviour which may have seemed to show want of respect. I cannot alter my nature, and we take such different views of things. I have no hankering after wealth or position; and as long as I can live in the world, and give and take what I want to give and take, I don't care a jot whether men say I fail or succeed. I cannot give up my life to carving fortune out of commerce, because I don't want fortune, and I do want my life — every breath of it. I thank you most sincerely for the offer you made last night; but, believe me, I should do you an injustice and myself an outrage if I accepted it; so, in all gratefulness, I decline it. I believe, under my mother's will, something in the shape of an annuity was left to Robert and myself. In justice that should be yours, but I know you won't take it, and therefore I will ask you to make it over to me. I take it I can live on that; but in any case my hope is to make a living with my pen. The last year of my life has

not been quite so purposeless as you have thought, and through it the conclusion has been fixed in my mind that I have no desire to lead any life but a writer's. So I 've worked with that end in view, and when I leave your house I shall go to London in the hope of producing anything that is in me; at first, I suppose, as a journalist, and afterwards — but always as a writer or — nothing."

So ended what Will always afterwards regarded as the longest and most uninteresting speech of his life.

"William," said James Cumming, raising the same white hand of warning which, twenty years before, had been shaken in the face of the man who since had drifted to the gunyah in the far South, "William, you are a Bohemian."

Will smiled with a brighter expression on his face than it had worn for some time. "I believe I am, sir; but I'm pleased to receive this confirmation from you."

"Do you know, William, that Bohemianism means beggary, vagabondage, and miserable exile?"

"If a beggar be a Bohemian, then at least, sir, he lives his own life, and sees his own world; instead of giving his life to some one else, shutting his eyes forever to his own world, and breathing always an atmosphere that is foreign to him."

"You are wrong, altogether wrong, William, and, as you will acknowledge some day, very foolish. However, I am glad to find that you are not actuated by motives of pure indifference. To prolong this

conversation would be painful, unnecessarily so; but, before going farther, are you quite sure you do not wish to reconsider this?"

"Absolutely sure."

"In that case then, I have only to express my regret, and to say that I will arrange the annuity question as you wish. Having accumulated all your life, it is somewhat larger now than the original pittance left; but I warn you that even now it is no more than you have of late been accustomed to spend on presents and little incidentals, not more, I should say, than £150 or £250 a year."

"Many men have had less, and—in any case, I am content."

James Cumming rose and threw the end of his cigar into an ash-tray. "You have chosen your own way, William; and I have nothing further to say, except that neither now or at any other time need you consider yourself banished from my house."

Will held out his hand. "Thank you very much," he said.

"But," continued the rich man, "I must add that, since you really decline to be guided by my plans and suggestions for your welfare, I, on my side, must clearly declare my responsibility in your life at an end."

There was little left to be said on either side. In his own mind James Cumming had ceased to think seriously of Will's affairs two years before, when he had arrived at the conclusion that the elder of the

two brothers was the man who would succeed. So, for the time, these two who had lived during almost the whole of the life of the younger, as father and son, parted, and Will walked out into the garden to look for Trottie.

After wandering somewhat absent-mindedly through the garden, Will walked down to the boat-house, where he found an under-gardener stowing a lunch-basket in the bows of the Fairie, under directions delivered in person by Trottie.

"I thought you might like a picnic-lunch to-day, Will; because — because it 's such beautiful weather, you know."

Trottie was blushing violently in her attempt to hide evidence of the instinct which had told her that lunch on that day would be more enjoyable anywhere than at a table presided over by James Cumming.

So Trottie took her old seat in the Fairie's stern-sheets, and Will paddled slowly up the river to the little creek which opens out above the island called Tatham's. Tying the boat up under the willows there, Will and Trottie spread out on a couple of stretchers, the dainty little lunch which Trottie's old nurse had provided, and chatted in excellent spirits all through a meal which would have been something of an ordeal to both if partaken of at the Elms.

Luncheon over, Will pulled up to Molesey Lock, and, drifting down stream in the late afternoon, he told Trottie all that had happened since her father had suggested her withdrawal from the dining-room on the

previous evening. Trottie listened sympathetically through the story, and at its conclusion somewhat surprised the teller of it by saying, thoughtfully: —

"I 'm so glad, Will."

Will digested this remark in silence for a minute or two, and then said: "I am very glad you are pleased, Trottie — very glad. It seemed to me the one thing for me to do, and your father would never understand the only kind of success I want. I don't even think he would call it success, and perhaps he may be right. But it is all I want, however little others might think of it."

"But I should never think little of it, Will," said Trottie, her eyes brightening; "and neither will the people in that other world you are going into, and whose opinions will be the only ones you will care about."

"But I shall always care more about yours, Trottie, than any one else's." Will's voice dropped unconsciously into a lower key. "And you won't forget me enough to have no opinion, Trottie, will you? Perhaps you won't see me for a long time; but we have always been — together, and you won't quite forget, will you?"

"Don't, Will — don't talk like that; it hurts." The Fairie was alongside the boat-house at the Elms then, and the light of the setting sun on the river was dim and shadowy. "You are my brother, Will dear, and I shall never, never forget, even though I do not see you for — for ever so long. But I shall see

you, why should I not? There is no reason why you should not come to the Elms sometimes."

"No, perhaps not, Trottie. Yet for some time — But there, you are loyal, little Trottie, and you will not forget. But just now, here by the boat-house where we have been so happy, I am going to say good-bye for a time. I told your groom to take my Gladstone to the station this afternoon, and I am going up to town. I shall go and see Hinton at his rooms in the Temple, and to-morrow I will find lodgings for myself."

"Oh, Will," said Trottie, laying one tremulous little hand on his shoulder. "I did not think you were going at once. Will dear, must you go to-night?"

"Yes, little girl; I don't want to sleep here. You can guess that I —"

"Yes, yes! Only I had not thought of your going to-night. But I 'm not going to be stupid — don't you be afraid. I know it 's better. You will succeed, Will. The success we want — that you and I want you to have, and — Oh, good-bye, Will!"

"Good-bye, little girl! It won't be for very long, and we shall not forget. Good-bye, my dear little sister!"

At nine o'clock that evening, Will, having remembered that his friend would be at work at that time, in the office of the great daily on the staff of which he earned his living, drove down Fleet Street in a hansom. At the enquiry-desk in the lower office

of the "Daily Dispatch," Will asked a clerk to give Mr. Hinton his card.

"Mr. Hinton, sir?" said the pale-faced youth at the enquiry-desk. "Mr. Hinton left London for South America the day before yesterday. I beg pardon, sir? No, something to do with the trouble in Paraguay, I think, sir."

Will walked out to a telegraph-office, and wired to Oxford for all letters to be forwarded to an address in London. Then he took his first night walk down busy, rushing Fleet Street. And when a reporter, rushing out of Wine Office Court with a sheaf of "copy" in one hand, cannonaded against him, and, swearing hurriedly, continued on his mad career; Will Darley suddenly realised, for the first time in his life, that he was alone in the world.

Part III

CHAPTER XIV

IN A BUSH TOWNSHIP

In the North one feels the years: their birth, youth, prime, old age, and death. Down South one feels in every nerve of one's body, the days: their fresh innocent babyhood, when the grass glistens; their gallant enthusiastic youth, when the warm air effervesces; their strong, clear prime, when the trees rustle in the sunlight's glare; their genial, calm old age, when the shadows in the gullies lengthen slowly; and, lastly, their sudden, mystical death, when the blue haze hides weird night springing upon the world.

Nature knows no discord; and this difference is in perfect harmony with all the other differences of double, treble crops; vegetation rampantly luxuriant; life, animal and vegetable, which rushes into the sunlight, shoots and throbs through its fierce, short-lived strength, then falls, decays, vanishes, while a moon turns from crescent to sphere. But the plants live in every leaf, and the animals in every pore.

There was a sage once, who said that every single thing known to the mind of man was the product of Sunshine and Industry. When one thinks of this in

the sense the man meant it, the remark is truth. But, refusing to think of this, or of anything else, hazy impressions may fill one's mind of certain things which are the product rather of sunshine and indolence, or again, of grey dulness and morbidness, rather than of sunshine and industry.

Being a post-town, and therefore a place at which Cobb's coaches stop, having an "Hotel," and being therefore a place at which shearers, swagmen, and other folk of more or less independent means, pause, sometimes indefinitely; Wydah on the Narrabri road, was a township of importance. There were other features too, noticeable in this place, and which have only to be mentioned to secure for the township of Wydah the respect to which one of the centres of a great squatting district is entitled. It had a police-station, or "Lock-up," as one called it when one had resided for any length of time in Wydah. True, this establishment was also the private residence of the district sergeant, his wife, and the twins with which police sergeants in the Australian provinces seem generally blessed. But as far as that is concerned, it was also a registrar office, a laundry, and a place from which to obtain timber-getter's licenses. These things were purely incidental adjuncts, however. The place was a police-station, and, marked in Skinner's Gazeteer as such, of course gave Wydah a standing and importance not dreamed of in such small towns as Mia-Mia, Burrill, or Woodford, where the hotels have only Colonial wine-licenses, and the total number or

houses is not more than say five. In Wydah there were eleven, without counting the new galvanised iron school-house in the paddock behind the Lock-up.

Despite all this, however, — and, without going a hundred miles from Woodford even, one might find places where such things would have meant endless brag, and the formation of a corporation and a school of arts, — in spite of all they might have done to attract notice, the inhabitants of Wydah were a steady-going, almost conservative body of people, who adhered to old customs in their manner of living; had never been visited by a governor of the colony; held only four race-meetings in the year; voted solid for free-trade at every election; and were rarely seen drunk in the day-time.

On a certain September afternoon which gave promise of hot summer days to come, the population of Wydah was mostly out with its bullock-waggons, or post and rail splitting in the Bush. The town was not by any means deserted, however, for on the verandah of the post-office, which was also the general store of Wydah, the store-keeper and his son Jim were sleeping peacefully; the one with a copy of the "Narrabri Herald" over his head, and the other with his dusty boots resting on a case of "Conqueror" tobacco.

Nor was this all. On the verandah of the Wydah hotel — frequently a focus for the commercial life of the town — evidences of civilisation were even more marked. There Mick Kenna the landlord, Tom

Middle Greyness

Radnor the blacksmith, and a swagman referred to as "His Nibs," were playing euchre for drinks, and had evidently won and lost stakes to a very considerable amount. There were no races being held at the time, and this was just an ordinary week-day afternoon in September.

Suddenly the swagman referred to as "His Nibs," placed his cards face downwards on the boards of the verandah, and said, "Hullo, boss! Here's some one on a roan horse with a blazed face, comin' down the road."

The three men rose, and, shading their eyes with dark, tobacco-stained palms, gazed down the long, white road. The blacksmith, assuming indifference, began to fill his pipe. Mick Kenna, who was an impulsive Irishman, made no attempt to disguise his interest in the event.

"That's Bob Foley's horse," he said, — "Bob Foley's roan horse from Warroo, I'll take my oath to that. But it's not Bob Foley riding him. Bob wears a red shirt, and this man's got a grey beard, anyhow."

"Perhaps it's Foley's brother," suggested Radnor; "Foley had a brother, come out from the old country in June, you know."

"No, it is n't him; but — My oath, it's old Crawford; that 's who it is, — old Crawford from Warroo Gully. He must have bought Foley's horse, — good horse that, too, — I'll bet you drinks the roan horse stops here of his own accord."

"Done; and I'll lay another round old Crawford don't get off here," said Radnor, as he lit his pipe, and squatted down to watch developments.

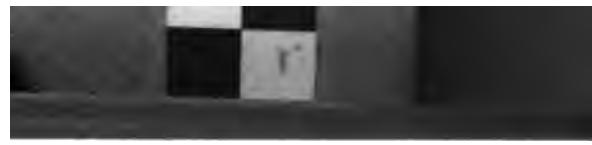
Mick Kenna won his bet, and the blacksmith was on the winning side, too; for though the roan horse did stop opposite the verandah, its rider did not dismount, but, sitting his horse with all the lounging ease of an old bushman, said, "Good-day, boss!" as he pushed on down the road, having nodded to Radnor and the swagman.

This man, who had been Darley in the old world, and was Crawford in the new, had changed very little since the night when he had sat reading the scrap of soiled newspaper left by his chance guests in the gunyah at Warroo. His hair and beard were a little rougher and more shaggy, but his limbs were apparently as supple, and his frame as strong, as on the afternoon he had spent in "breaking out" iron-bark sleepers, between two and three years back.

When he arrived opposite the general store and post-office, the bushman pulled his horse in, and, throwing one leg over the pommel of his saddle, called out to the sleeping store-keeper. The "Narrabri Herald" shook, and finally was raised and allowed to fall, as the store-keeper sat up and stared into the sunshine.

"Hullo, there! How's things out Warroo way?" said the disturbed man, rubbing his eyes sleepily.

"Same old thing, but timber getting a bit scarce," replied the bushman, as, slowly, he swung himself out of his saddle and on to the dusty road. Then he



passed the roan horse's bridle through a ring in one of the verandah posts of the store, and, sitting down on an empty packing-case, began to fill his pipe.

"Got anything here for me?" he asked, after a minute or two of silence.

"Yes," said the store-keeper. "Letter from England, came last week, and a parcel from Sydney yesterday. Bit before time for the Sydney parcel, is n't it? Friday used to be the day, — Friday near the the end of the month."

"Yes, it 's a bit early. Let 's have the letter, will you? I 'll get you to put the packet in a flour-bag with some 'baccy and things I want."

Slowly the store-keeper rose, stretching his long arms, and kicking his son in a friendly way to rouse that youth, or, at least, to stop his snoring. Then, followed by Darley, he entered the little store. The letter which was handed over to the man from the gunyah bore a London post-mark, and on the flap of its envelope was a crest, the crest of a well-known West End club. The crest did not interest Carberry the store-keeper, West End clubs being a little outside his line. But he had wondered a good deal about the letter, because whereas he had occasionally received letters from Sydney for Mr. Arthur Crawford, and every month had a packet for him bearing the label of a Sydney chemist, he had never before seen a letter from England addressed in that way. And these things interest a store-keeper in the back-blocks.

In a Bush Township

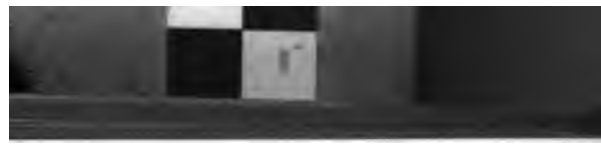
"There you are, sir; 'Arthur Crawford, Esq.,' and all the way from the old country."

"Ye-s — thanks. You might see about the 'baccy, and the other things, will you?"

The store-keeper's curiosity would have ended in direct questions to any one else; but there was something in the way Darley took his letter, and, having glanced at its address, placed it carefully in his pocket, which suggested to Carberry that questions in this case might be badly received.

Darley made his small purchases, and, having stowed the articles in a flour-bag, and strapped this to his saddle, put his arm through the roan horse's bridle and invited the store-keeper to look in at the hotel with him. The more distinctly a shanty any Bush hostelry may be, the more certain is it to be called an hotel. Nothing loth, the store-keeper reached for his broad-brimmed hat, and followed Darley out into the afternoon sunlight, and along the dusty road to the verandah where Mick Kenna and his two friends were still "passing" and "making" and "euchreing" each other, for drinks. A new arrival was an event worthy some consideration, however; and as Darley hitched his horse up for the second time, the three men threw their cards down and responded promptly to the bushman's invitation to "join us."

In the Bush, if one happens to be supplied with whiskey, or methylated spirits, or any other liquid refreshment, at a time when a man says, "What 's



yours?" one promptly throws away or leaves one's own liquor and walks to the bar for more. So the swagman and Tom Radnor followed the store-keeper and the man from the gunyah, into the stuffy little bar of the Wydah hotel, and imbibed from a fresh bottle of whiskey. At all events the bottle bore that name on its label. A man helps himself to whatever he drinks in Australia; and though it be only cayenne-flavoured rain-water, it is, at least, not measured out for him.

After an interval of ten minutes, the swagman claimed his rights as a colonial citizen, and the party drank solemnly at his expense. On the next day this man would probably arrive at the Warroo station homestead, some eight or ten miles away. There he would demand food, — begging they would call it in other countries, — and he would be supplied with a ration similar to that given the station hands.

Shortly afterwards, and in the natural course of events, Tom Radnor "shouted;" and when, as the last light of the setting sun was glimmering faintly through the trees across the road, the landlord's daughter came into the bar to light the big lamp, the store-keeper requested his friends to "Fill 'em up again."

Just before this, however, two bullock-drivers had lounged in across the verandah, and said, "Good-evening, Mick." They nodded to the other occupants of the bar, and payment for the whiskey to which they then helped themselves, was, without comment, included in the store-keeper's "shout."

Then the men began to talk; and the swagman, particularly, told some really full-bodied lies about horses he had ridden "the other side of the border." Other men dropped in, until all male Wydah was in the little bar, and the talk, turning on to sheep-dogs, became more exciting as the evening wore on. Towards nine o'clock a wager of ten pounds a side was concluded between the two bullock-drivers, in connection with a trial of their respective cattle-dogs, arranged to take place next day. Outside in the moonlight, four horses stood hitched to the verandah posts, and, scattered about in different attitudes on the verandah itself, lay nine dogs, mostly of the "cattle" persuasion.

"What time is it, Mick?" asked a long-limbed youth with a green silk handkerchief round his neck.

Mick put his head to the little window at the back of the bar, and called to his daughter: "Mary, run down to the store and ask what time it is, and — don't stop talking to Jim all night!"

A few minutes afterwards, Mary, a well-developed girl with hair the colour of dry charcoal, entered the bar to tell her father that the store-clock said, "A quarter after ten."

Then the man from Warroo rose from the barrel on which he had been sitting, and asked the room to drink before he said good-night. He had sat there smoking for more than an hour, without speaking a word. Before that he had broken a long silence by saying, "Damn!" when a piece of burning tobacco

fell from the store-keeper's pipe on to the back of his hand. During the last hour he had gazed fixedly at the wall facing him, and in his black eyes had been an expression which suggested their looking through rather than at the wall, and seeing things that were a long way off. His beard hid the expression of his mouth, but the look on his face generally had been one of quiet amusement. And this had gradually coarsened and become more gross, under the influence of Mick Kenna's whiskey.

He had filled his own glass, and, raising it to his lips, looked round the room and said, " Here 's to you all, gentlemen."

Just as the glass reached his lips, Darley's wrist brushed against the edge of the letter from England lying in an outer pocket of his coat. Probably the touch of it made him think of something, — perhaps the crest on the envelope, — for he lowered the glass again and laughed quietly. Picking it up almost immediately afterwards, however, he drained its contents, wished the company good-night, and walked out on to the verandah with the store-keeper.

" Queer chap, old Crawford," said the youth with the green handkerchief round his neck, pulling, as he spoke, a plug of tobacco from the waistband of his trousers.

There was not a man in the room who had not noticed Darley's quiet laugh, and there was not one who did not strongly object to that laugh. But they had met the man from the gunyah at different times dur-

ing several years, and recognised in him that indefinable something which goes to constitute what they called "a white man." Some people in England mean the same thing when they say a man is a "sportsman." The man they refer to might rob a bank, and that without falling very far in the estimation of those who judged him "sportsman." But they know he would not rob a child, and instinct tells them that starvation to follow would not prevent his paying a lost wager.

So, though amongst the crowd in the bar of the Wydah hotel there were men who looked upon cattle stealing as a harmless, almost honourable pursuit, there was yet no one who, in case of need, would not have lent a willing hand to help the grey-bearded man who lived in the humpy by the side of Warroo Gully.

CHAPTER XV

THE BEACHCOMBER AND HIS LETTER

THE Narrabri road was buried three inches deep in the dead whiteness of early summer's dust. So by day, its pallor in the shade and its glare in the sunlight brought water to one's eyes, and by night it glistened with the hushed white sheen of tombstones in a village churchyard. And in no part was the dust more thick and soft, than where the track to Warroo Hills branches off through the Bush.

Any one happening to ride past this point towards midnight of the day on which the man from the gunyah had visited Wydah, would have met Darley on his roan horse, with the flour-sack parcel strapped before him on his saddle, and a quince switch in his disengaged hand.

No one was riding there at the time in question, however; and when the beachcomber looked up and down before turning into the Warroo track, the Narrabri road, winding miles away on either side between tall gum-trees, was a picture which, painted by an artist whose soul had caught the sadness of the Bush, and called "Loneliness," would certainly have attracted notice.

The Beachcomber and His Letter

The Warroo road runs through really dense timber, and is essentially a walking track. For an hour, Darley the bushman had been riding along the smooth coach-road at a walking pace, his right leg thrown carelessly across the pommel of his saddle, a pipe in his mouth, his black eyes staring into space. Leaving the road, a sudden idea seemed to strike him, and whilst in the act of swinging his raised foot from its resting-place to the stirrup, he gave a shout which echoed right across the flat to White Ridge, and, cutting the roan horse's flank with his quince stick, he started off through the thick scrub at a hand gallop.

Twigs snapped; 'guanas slithered up the grey tree-trunks; possums coughed in startled astonishment; and saplings, brushing Darley's legs, seemed to resent the madness of his gallop. But the madness of it was apparently that which pleased the bushman, for, with head bent low over his horse's mane, he whispered queer words of encouragement; and once, in a place where the trees were so thick that in daylight most men would have dismounted and led their horses, Darley brought his quince stick whistling down on the animal's haunches, and sent the frightened brute bounding furiously through bush which even the moon's white rays could not penetrate.

For nearly five miles the roan plunged along with the jerky stride which is taken by a galloping horse when uncertain of its ground. Then, approaching the crest of Warroo Gully, the brute instinctively began to slacken, and would have broken to a trot. With

a laugh which sounded curiously discordant in that sleeping place of Nature, the beachcomber brought his switch sharply down again; and, scrambling, sliding, stumbling, and snorting with confusion, the roan horse galloped down the gully's steep slope, through the thick scrub at the bottom, and up amongst the hidden stumps and blue-gum saplings, to where the bark gunyah stood in a clear patch on the far side.

Tingling and alert, on the log before the humpy, Satan, the black kangaroo dog, barked in furious astonishment. From the tops of trees at the end of the clear patch, jackasses, fearing daybreak had come upon them unawares, cackled peevish disapproval. And the big, white moon, riding clear from behind a bank of cloud, shed its beautiful light over the whole scene, as Darley, with a laugh of sheer devilry, sprang from the back of his gasping horse, and sent the switch he carried flying through space to the side of the gully.

With the ease of long habit, he had in a couple of minutes unsaddled and unbridled the horse, chuckling the while to himself. Then he strapped a bell on the neck of the roan, and stooped to hobble the patient beast before turning it into the Bush. As he bent down, the animal's breath, coming in hot gasps, fell across his face, and he rose, throwing the hobbles to one side.

"Poor devil!" he muttered. Then, picking up a towel which lay on the log by the hut, he spent five minutes in giving the dripping horse a hard rub-down,

and finally left it to feed for the night in unhobbled freedom.

Midnight was past then, but the man with the grey beard evidently did not consider time of much importance, for he proceeded in a leisurely way, first, to feed the black dog with damper and some scraps of salt meat; next, to strip to the waist and wash himself in the little creek which ran through the gully; and, lastly, with drops of water sparkling like jewels in the moonlight over all his shaggy head and beard, to pour some whiskey into one of the cups, two or three of which were scattered about in the gunyah.

"My waters of Lethe will be good after the Wydah poison," he said to himself, as he took a sip from the cup before sitting down on the edge of his bunk.

Then he opened the flour-bag and took out sundry articles therefrom. He gazed hesitatingly at the little square packet from the Sydney chemist, but finally placed it on a shelf over his head, saying, as he did so, "No, I 've had enough Lethe for one night. That can wait!"

Before this he had lighted the candle of a lantern which hung from the little shelf, and now, taking another sip from the cup of whiskey at his side, he reached across to where his coat lay, and, drawing the English letter from its pocket, stretched himself in his bunk to peruse the epistle which had roused curiosity in the mind of the Wydah store-keeper. Whilst Darley lay reading the letter, his short pipe fell from

his mouth over the bunk side to the ground, and once or twice, the man muttered between his teeth as the light flickered or the thin foreign paper of his letter crumpled, and made reading difficult.

The letter was written by one of the friends of the bushman's old life, — the life in which he had been Henry Manton Darley. It began by explaining the writer's surprise and pleasure at hearing again from an old chum whom he had thought dead; and the first three words — "My Dear Darley" — made the man in the gunyah move his head uneasily, and grip the paper between long nervous fingers. He had not seen those three words on paper for something like twenty years, and to a man on any of the world's beaches "My Dear ——" So-and-so, is a three-volume story of reminiscences.

The letter also said that its writer thought his friend Darley ought to come back and face things out.

"You see, Darley (I can manage Crawford on the envelope but nowhere else), that continental business was forgotten long ago," said the letter. "There are very few men about town who remember you, and those who do would be as willing as I to shake hands and put your name up at the old club. I suppose, from the outlandish address you give, you are running a sheep-farm (?) or something; but you were not meant for that, old man. Come back to England, and — look here, if the old devil 's as strong as ever, you can live at my place in Wales, and run a little Inferno of your own there, if you like — but come back."

More of this followed, and at some places the bushman smiled in his grey beard. Once or twice he winced as his roan horse had winced under the stinging cut of the quince stick; and once he laid the letter down and laughed, the same quiet laugh the satire of which — too feelingless to be cynical — had jarred on the occupants of the Wydah bar-room. Then came a fresh page which began as follows:

"However, you ask for full particulars about your boys; and certainly their lives, or one of them anyhow, should be sufficient, if anything would, to bring you back to Pall Mall."

Then followed particulars of Robert Darley's career, under James Cumming's guidance, from the date at which the young politician left Oxford.

"Doubtless," said the letter, "you heard all about the first important impression he made in the debate over that Siam business; but you may not know that at the opening of the session this year he was chosen to second the Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne. Of course it was all cut and dried for him, but he broke down in the middle, forgot his lines so to speak, and made a most brilliant finish with the bit between his teeth. Fussy old L—— grumbled, of course; but your son's set were charmed, simply; and great things are expected of him in debate. If he can only be given office of some kind, and get a chance with that convincing tongue of his, I believe his future as a politician is assured. Yet, with it all, there 's something about this boy of yours I cannot for the

life of me understand. To be sure he looks upon me, and I believe spoke of me in the Carlton the other day, as 'a favoured but fossilised fragment of last century's diplomacy.' This was to a privileged audience, and though the young gentleman naturally does not take me into his confidence, yet we are good friends, and I have watched him closely. At times, at a meeting of government supporters in Bristol last week, for instance, he says things which carry me back to P—— Strasse and the days when you, Darley, startled us all with your new Pittism. Sometimes, in little bursts of brilliancy, there is much of his father's grip and subtlety, and then there seems to come a break — no, not a break, but a lapse, a fading into tame mediocrity. He evidently has phases, and his life, I should say, is very variable. Some particular thing there appears to be that is lacking in him, but what it is I cannot say. A little turn of Nature's key, some small added chip in the mosaic, would, I fancy, complete and make harmony of the whole. However, his possibilities, even probabilities, are great, and there is much for you to be proud of in your eldest son."

It was at this point in the long and closely written letter, that the bushman's pipe fell from his mouth, and he lay for perhaps half an hour staring at the page which these last words completed. Then, with a sigh and a muttered, "Cui Bono?" he turned to the next sheet.

"With regard to your younger son, Will," began the following page, "it is hard to know exactly what

to say. I have not had the same opportunities of studying Will, as have been afforded me in connection with Robert. Still I have met him several times at James Cumming's place on the river; I spent three days last year at the Grange, Bramwood, when he was there; I saw him occasionally at Oxford; and he dined with me at the club shortly after last Christmas. Also I have talked to James Cumming about him, and heard all Robert has to say of his brother. But you will remember I was never really friendly with your millionaire cousin, and our talk is always on the surface. Will, himself, is hard to understand. To me, he seems kindly, good-natured to a fault, very sensitive, inclined to chafe under the slightest restraint, generous and honourable, but, withal (I am sorry to say it), a dreamer, indolent, vague, and unstable in all things. You know, probably, that he has just left Oxford, and I learn that Cumming was anxious for him to enter the firm in which old Anthony Cumming made his enormous wealth. This, Will flatly refused to do, the explanation of his motive in the matter being, so Cumming afterwards told me, the only decided thing he had ever said in his life. I hear now that he has cut himself off from the Cumming menage and drifted into Fleet Street, with a vague idea of making a living by his pen, or something of the sort. I don't like telling you this, old friend, but my information would, I take it, be valueless, if not complete, and, well, you know a father must not expect to have two great men for sons."

Middle Greyness

Here the bushman lying in his bunk winced and turned uneasily on his side.

"To put it plainly, Will appears to me to have all his father's unconventionality and disinclination for steady work, with very little trace of his father's strength and brain."

Here the bushman laughed, laying the letter down as he did so, and causing Satan to whine drowsily, from where he was stretched at the gunyah's entrance. Dogs have no taste for satire, light or bitter.

In the perusal of this letter, Darley, the father of Robert and Will, had made several pauses of varying duration, and when he read the lines last quoted, the coming of another day was drawing very near. Turning over the last page of his letter, the man in the gunyah caught a glimpse of these words: —

"And now, my old friend, with regard to your own life, I am convinced that — "

And then the candle, which for some minutes had been sputtering in the rusty lantern over the bushman's head, gave a final spit and expired. The gunyah was left in thick darkness now, and the Bush outside was black because the moon had set. Only two things within Darley's range of vision were light, and these were the eyes of the dog Satan, who lay with his long muzzle half buried in the grass, blinking at his master.

"A father must not expect to have two great men for sons," muttered Darley. "But he may expect to have one, and — perhaps he may give to that son the one thing missing in him."

Then Darley dropped the sheets of the letter onto the foot of his bunk, and turned over in the darkness to sleep. As he turned on his side, the memory of the last lines of his letter, which the dying candle had enabled him to read, flashed across the man's big, throbbing mind; and the next instant Satan rose to his feet and whined most dismally, for again that mocking, inhuman chuckle had proceeded from the bunk in which the bushman lay, as, his long beard shaking at every word, he said: —

"And now with regard to my own life, I am convinced that — the light went out some time back. Satan, you fool dog, lie down!"

CHAPTER XVI

THE BUSHMAN IN HIS BUSH

THE Bush day's laughing babyhood had come, and sparkling gems of dew shimmered on every grass-blade and glittered over all the country's face.

Darley the bushman who, waking some four hours after the candle in his lantern had burned out, walked down to the creek for his early ablutions, was distinctly an improvement on Darley the beachcomber, who had gone to sleep after calling Satan a fool dog, in the small hours of the same morning. Darley in the morning sunlight was a Bohemian of Bohemians, and an artist to the backbone, though that backbone was weak, and the black streak in him was strong, stronger than life, and as strong as death.

Standing at the entrance to his gunyah, the man gulped down deep draughts of the pure, fresh beauty of morning in the Bush.

Beautifully and truly has Australia been called the Land of the Dawning. But only the dweller in the Bush, only the man whose soul has been in real touch with the ghostly spirit of the Bush, may hope to read and understand the grotesque outlines of

Nature's early experimenting, which, in every part of it, give to that great island of the South, a beauty which cannot be found in other lands.

The classical student, his mind filled with the lore of old world genius, may look in vain for gracious beauty in the Bush. The romancer of Europe's days of chivalry, may travel between gum-trees for years and find no chord in his nature made responsive by their weird atmosphere. The man learned in the magnificence of the Orient, the languorous fascination of the fabled East, may wander from Torres Straits to Port Phillip, and see nothing in that pathless moulding place of evolution, that appeals to the artist in him.

Beasts that cannot walk, but hop; birds that cannot fly or sing; trees that shed no foliage, but only change their bark, — these are incongruities which suggest no beautiful thoughts, no bright fancies, no passion of admiration, in the man who judges beauty by association, and links all Creation with the history of peoples and places. He either passes through it all with eyes seeing only monotony and dull want of charm; or, a little better, he hurries on, oppressed by a sense of the incongruity of scenes which suggest great Nature's early errors, disturbed by the lack of modesty in corners of the earth, the products of which seem, in their strange nakedness, to have been prematurely flung into existence, and neglected by that loving hand which in other lands has draped them tenderly from vulgar humanity's prying eyes.

Middle Greyness

But grant, to begin with, the clean Bohemianism that in the South is called "white;" add to it the germs, cultivated or in the rough, of the artist's mind; give to the whole life, with the Bush for its home,—and you shall have a man who, though vagabond to the core, shall yet be touched in every fibre of his body, a dozen times in a day, by the strange rustlings, the vibrating silences, sudden noises, faint perfumes, and gnarled outlines, of this land of misty beginnings.

Darley, world's tramp and outcast to his finger-ends, had yet lived for years in the atmosphere of his gunyah by Warroo Gully. Its weirdness was part of him. Its strange beauty, drawn into his very soul by the innate force and understanding strength of his morbid mind, permeated through, acted and re-acted upon, the man's every thought and deed. Side by side in Darley's inner self, the Spirit of the Bush, breathing the perfume of the far South, fought and mingled with the black streak born of heredity and an old world's vice. But the black streak was a living growth; the other a mystical creation, a beautiful, intangible thing of atmosphere. The net result of the struggle was the man in the gunyah; its keynote, the laugh which made Satan whine.

Darley washed in the creek, and then talked to the kangaroo dog whilst, in his billy over the fire, water boiled for the morning tea. Breakfast over, the man and the dog wandered off, away from the gully and the Warroo track, past the edge of the comparatively clear ground on which the gunyah stood, and into the denser

Bush. Satan, walking in front, stopped by the side of a felled grey gum, and stretched himself in the coarse undergrowth which had been trodden down all round the log. That the dog should know where his master was going, and what he intended to do, seemed perfectly natural to Darley; and, without noticing the animal at all, he drew off his coat and picked up a long axe from where it stood by the end of the grey gum.

Half "trimmed" posts and rails were lying near the log, and the bushman evidently intended cutting out more. But before the black dog had closed his eyes for the luxury of a morning snooze, Darley had thrown the axe down again, and, taking the English letter of the night before from the pocket of his coat, had seated himself with his back against the log, and begun to read.

Lying in his bunk under the flickering light of his rusty lantern, he had said, "Cui Bono?" But that was in the atmosphere where the black streak reigned supreme. Had he been sitting in the moonlight outside his gunyah, it might have been different. But in the humpy, the "waters of Lethe" at his side, and the echo of his own laugh in the Wydah bar-room ringing in his head, he had said, "Cui Bono?" Now, out there by the fallen grey gum, the warmth of the Bush day's lusty youth was upon him, and as he read the long letter through again, the man's strong mind evolved, turned over, and rejected, a dozen bold schemes, a score of tempting plans.

Middle Greyness

His younger son he dismissed absolutely from his mind, with an unexpressed sentence in which pathos blended strangely with contempt.

"He has too much of me, and too little of mine."

This man of the beach and the Bush — the Bush of Australia is to the South what the world's beaches are to the world — had assuredly no leanings towards conventionality in any part of his many-sided nature. But in him was one passionate desire, — the piston-rod which kept the wheels of his life in motion.

A son of his, flesh of his flesh and child of his strength, should force from the world for himself, the power and fame which it denied the father with his black streak.

"And this is Robert," muttered the man, leaning in the sunshine against the grey gum log. "And a chip in the mosaic is missing; and there is no one, but that grey, colourless fool with his money, to fit it in. And I — am in the Bush. Satan, if your illustrious namesake still dealt in souls I — Bah! What was it the mesmerist in Santiago said? 'A mind is stronger than a fiend; a will can bend a circumstance' — How did it go on, fool dog?"

At mention of his name, Satan had edged nearer his master, and laid his black muzzle on the man's knee.

"Why should n't a will bend a man's life, as well as a circumstance, — fit in the missing chip, and turn the key of power? Eh, Satan, why don't you speak?"

The dog looked up in its master's face with all a brute's love shining out of eyes which seemed to say, "Here am I. I cannot speak, but you can take my life, if that is any good to you." Vagabond Darley was touched by the look, and fondled the dog's head idly with one hand, whilst drawing the other across his own hot forehead.

"Living in his world, breathing the air Robert breathes, and holding his mind in my own two hands, why should I not supply the missing chip? Give him all of me, except — give his mind, my mind's knowledge, his head, my head's strength; keeping back all the other. Live his life while he thought he lived it, and force him into success in his own chosen atmosphere — the greyness that old world loves!"

The bushman did not speak aloud; but these were amongst the thoughts that fell over each other in his strong mind, while the sunshine drenched all the air with sweetness, and made the golden wattles round about drunk with the enthusiasm of the morning. Even these thoughts, vague and disjointed as they might be, were not the hasty product of a few minutes' meditation. They were the result of four hours dreaming in the gunyah, cleansed by the first sweet draughts of morning air, and made vivid by the strong sunlight of the hours which had passed since Darley stood dripping by the side of the creek in the gully.

"Satan, good dog, we will not dream this thing, we will do it. You and I, we will leave this place where the trees and the air are living and throbbing,

and we will go to that other place, away up in the North, where they do not live, but are drilled and forced carefully through different set phases. Poor old dog, you would freeze there, in the greyness of it. And if you barked with rage or pleasure, they would tie you up, dog, lest you broke something. They would, indeed, and consider you a worthless brute if you barked again, or rolled on your back as you love to roll and grunt at the sun. But we will go, dog, nevertheless. We will go and pretend that we, like them, are not living, but only developing our phases. We will cover up our strength with greyness, Satan, and give it him to win power with. We will fool them all with our Quaker sadness; and he shall win, dog — by the sunshine, Satan, he shall win, and they shall never guess it 's us, so beautifully without living will we live!"

The bushman rose, pushing the dog with his wondering, questioning eyes, aside.

"They froze me once," he said, picking his axe up from where it lay in the grass. "Yes; but I have lived since then, and have had more sunshine. I could do nothing myself; but I can give it to him. I can piece his mind together, and he shall be strong. I will be to him what you are to me, Satan — anything, so I can give him the strength. He shall have all I give to Lethe, all I dream, and all I give to these logs. He shall have me. I will force it into him, and in their greyness he shall win, and hold all he wins. Come on, dog!"

Darley turned towards the clear patch again, and, together, the dog and the man began to walk in the direction of the gunyah.

"He shall win," the bushman muttered, swinging his axe as he stepped out through the undergrowth. "And I will see it and feel it, and then, when he holds everything, I will drift back again into the sunshine to die, instead of fading into nothing as they do there. Ah, the fools, but I can feel it now! And I will live in their greyness and beat it down. I 'm strong now, dog; and it 's all for him, every breath of it; and when he has it, he shall — he shall have all things."

It was almost a month after Darley and the black dog had sat by the grey gum beyond the clear patch where the gunyah stood. The full brightness of young summer was upon the country, and Sydney harbour was a picture for a man to carry about in his heart to look at on dull days. The gangway was being hauled aboard a big Orient liner at Circular Quay, and the water under her stern was changing from clear pale green to yellow, and from yellow to frothy cream, as she drifted slowly, almost imperceptibly, from the crowded wharf.

There are men in sunshiny Sydney who hunger and long for a glimpse of the old country, as a convict on a chain-gang longs for liberty, or a leper in the lazaretto hungers after civilisation. A sad feature in the lives of some of these men is, that every week they wander listlessly down the streets of one of the

most naturally beautiful cities in the world, to the wharves of the harbour, in order to make one of the crowd who have come to wish "*bon voyage*" to friends leaving in one of the great liners for the mother-country. These hungry souls stand there, and watch and listen, that they may see the faces, and hear the voices, of men and women who actually are going North by East, and in a few weeks' time will really land on English soil. At times, carried away by the morbid enthusiasm of the moment, these men with cravings, join with those whose friends are on the ship in waving hats or handkerchiefs, vaguely, to some figure on the vessel's deck which catches their attention.

Amongst the hundreds of hats and handkerchiefs waved as the "Cuzco" sidled off from Circular Quay on this sunny morning, there may have been some one or two of the indefinite kind that were intended for the wiry-looking, brown-faced man who, with a black kangaroo dog at his side, stood on the foc'sle head, resting one hand on the foremost shroud of the "Cuzco's" starboard rigging. There may have been, particularly as his was a striking figure. But certainly there was no one in the crowd who knew this man.

As the ship steamed slowly down the great harbour, the man with the dog still retained his position on the foc'sle head, his hand raised to the rigging, and his eyes gazing admiringly out on the little thickly-wooded bays and inlets past which the vessel steered, and

resting dreamily on islands scattered like emeralds over the sunlit, sapphire surface of the water.

Later on, the ship steamed out in massive dignity between the clean-cut cliffs of Sydney Heads, past the jagged, savage-looking rocks on which the "Dunbar," with her wailing hundreds, was battered into fragments; and so to the great, sweeping Pacific beyond.

Then, as the black cliffs gradually turned blue and indistinct in the distance, the man on the foc'sle head lowered his hand from the rigging, and looked down at his dog.

"When we see those Heads again, Satan, the missing chip will have been fitted into the mosaic. We shall have won; do you hear, dog? And he will have power and fame and a place, in the greyness."

Just then a bell rang for the second-class passengers' mid-day dinner.

"Come on, Satan," said the man from the gunyah. "We will begin. They have their meals by rule, my friend, in this world. That's a vice they call regularity. Do you think we shall choke if we try to eat? Don't look at me like that. Come along, fool dog — come along!"

Part IV

CHAPTER XVII

TWO DINNERS AND A SUPPER

"I AM more than gratified by the way in which you steadily gain ground in politics, Robert," said James Cumming, as he greeted Robert over the breakfast-table of The Elms, some three months after Will's departure from that establishment to Fleet Street.

"It 's good of you to say so," replied Robert, with a smile.

"Not at all. I mean it," said the older man. "Your progress is most satisfactory."

"Yes, things have been going fairly well lately, and I 'm very glad you 're pleased."

"You may be always sure of pleasing me, Robert, while you continue as you have begun. I think you are hardly likely, in view of your present outlook, to regret having acted on my plans in having adopted a career, or to envy your brother, who chose to ignore all suggestions from me. I don't think your position compares very unfavourably at the moment with that of — with William's."

"No— er — not unfavourably," Robert looked full of assured confidence in himself and his prospects.

Two Dinners and a Supper

"By the way, how did you get on at the North London meeting last night?" asked Mr. Cumming.

"Oh, very well indeed, thanks. They gave me a regular ovation when I'd finished, and seemed really interested while I spoke. Mellish said it would do the party considerable good."

"Ah, well, that's pleasing, and in keeping with the rest. I shall be in town to-morrow afternoon; and, if you can spare time to spend with so insignificant a personage, I shall be glad to dine with you at your club. What do you say?" Mr. Cumming smiled at his own heavy banter, and his face showed the vainest of self-depreciation.

"I shall be delighted, of course," said Robert, "and will wait for you at the club from six-thirty."

"That's all right. I shall see you there then, at about seven. Here comes Charlotte. You might touch the bell, will you, and we'll have the coffee in."

On the following evening, when James Cumming was in London as the self-invited guest of his adopted son, Trottie and Miss Lipston, at The Elms, dined together, principally on soup and sweets, as solitary fair ones will. For some little time Trottie had not spoken, and her face bore what was for her a very unusually abstracted look.

"Is anything the matter, dear?" asked Miss Lipston, when the two were playing with their dessert. "You are so very quiet this evening, and you have no idea how sad you look."

Middle Greyness

"There 's nothing at all the matter," said Trottie, doubtfully; "and it 's absurd of me to look sad. The worst of it is, that I feel dreadfully miserable too."

"But, my dear, why? What has made you miserable?" Miss Lipston was above all things a precise and reasoning little lady.

"That 's just the stupidness of it," replied Trottie, smiling dolefully as she arranged patterns on her plate with grape-skins. "Nothing has made me miserable, and I 've nothing to do with it. I feel as Mary does, I think, when she says some one is walking over her grave, only I don't think any one would bother walking over mine, and it would not matter if they did."

"My dear!"

"Well, don't you ever feel like that, Miss Lipston; as though something were going to happen to you, something you had nothing to do with and could not alter. Kismet, you know, and gods on hills reclining, and that sort of thing."

"Your quotations are a little uncertain, dear. Let us go into the drawing-room and have some music."

Now oddly enough, at the moment when Trottie at The Elms was suffering from a consciousness of her grave being desecrated, or her destiny being played with, James Cumming and Robert Darley, sitting over their liqueurs and coffee in the dining-room of the Carlton, were discussing no less a personage than pretty Trottie herself.

Years before, James Cumming had determined in his own mind that as soon as one of his adopted sons

achieved the success which the greatest disappointment of his life had prevented his giving to a son of his own, that adopted son should marry Trottie. The man's aim and desire was simplicity itself. He had adopted the Darley boys solely with a view to winning for one of them, a position to which he would have forced a son bearing his name. That being attained by one of the young men, he should be united to James Cumming by a tie closer than adoption, and become his son, in law, as well as in fact. Of Trottie's personal feeling in such a matter he simply did not think. And, had he considered the subject at all, the idea of Trottie's objecting to marry any man in the kingdom chosen by him, James Cumming, as a fitting recipient for her heart, and "so forth," — as he would put it, — this would have seemed to her father ridiculous.

Robert, too, had long since grown accustomed to a general hazy belief that amongst the other pre-ordained features of his life, such as success in politics, and the eventual holding of a portfolio, one arranged-for epoch was marriage, and that with his cousin Trottie. James Cumming had airily hinted at this years before, when he, Robert, left Oxford; and it was his vague acceptance of things decided, which had caused Robert to unconsciously adopt that bantering, half proprietary tone which had so often jarred on the sensitive girl. It was not exactly vanity on his part, so much as belief in inevitability, which had caused Robert frequently to look at his pretty cousin, thinking of her,

not without pleasure, as his future wife. But all this was misty, and an anticipation no more belonging to the immediate future, than were the ministerial dignities afore-mentioned.

"You will soon have to think about marrying, Robert," said the rich man, fingering his coffee cup.

"Surely it is rather early yet for that," rejoined Robert, quietly. At that moment he fancied he could see a picture which showed himself and Rollo Croft standing by the river-bank at Surbiton, and that he could hear the artist saying, "A man strikes the picturesque possibilities out of his life when he marries, and, besides, it is n't fair to his friends."

"Not a bit too early, Robert, — not a bit too early for a good thing." Mr. Cumming, having dined satisfactorily, was in his heavy pleasantry vein.

"But there 's a great deal to be done just now," suggested Robert.

"The more reason then that you should marry soon. A politician and a public man gains weight in the public's estimation, Robert, by marriage — and a family."

"Yes, I suppose he does." Robert spoke very doubtingly. Flash silhouettes were passing through his mind, of the main salon of a bijou hotel in Paris; the deep lights and shadows of The Odalisque; Bèté's piquant face; Croft's languid graces; the lurid glare of "Burgundy nights," — all in sharp contrast to everything connected with the Elms and James Cumming. Robert had no desire just yet, to yield up his freedom in exchange for any kind of yoke.

Noticing the expression on the younger man's face, James Cumming experienced a feeling sufficiently akin to real embarrassment to be something very novel to him. It suggested a possibility which had not entered into his calculations; and when the millionaire next spoke, there was a curious hesitancy in his tone.

"You must not for a moment," he began, "suppose that I wish in any way to force your inclinations in this matter, — not for a moment. But I have of course noticed — I have been conscious, I may say for years, of the trend of your feelings towards — er — Charlotte, and have been rather pleased than otherwise by the intention they suggested. It is all in accordance with what I have anticipated for years, and have regarded as part of your career. And now, naturally I think, as a father, I should be glad to have some definite understanding — er — "

"I have never in any way approached Trottie on this subject," said Robert; "but as regards myself, I confess I have always — But I have really no right whatever to speak of Trottie's feelings towards me; because I don't know — that is, I have never spoken to her about it."

A smile of considerable relief passed over James Cumming's countenance, and his face assumed a look of something like triumph.

"Exactly," he said. "But you are quite man of the world enough to know what is yours for the asking."

Robert flushed slightly. "That assumption, I

think, would be a little premature," he said. To Robert, it seemed that his winning of Trottie's love was something in which success must come to him as it came in politics. And the belief was pleasurable. But Robert's mind was occupied then with Rollo Croft and his sayings, and in that atmosphere he had no inclination to discuss the period of his life at which Trottie should become part of his career.

"Ah, well," said Mr. Cumming. "Of course it's very proper and modest that you should think so. But Charlotte is no longer a child, and, of course, when I talk about your marrying soon, I do not mean next week, or even next month; but soon, Robert,—the sooner the better for both of you, I think."

The younger man bowed and tried for the fiftieth time to banish thoughts of Rollo Croft and The Odalisque from his mind.

"However," continued Trottie's father, "I am sure I'm quite safe in leaving all that to you. And now I think we might adjourn to the smoking-room."

So, having arrived at an "understanding" eminently satisfactory to himself, if somewhat less so to Robert, Mr. James Cumming rose and led the way out of the great dining-room. Shortly afterwards, the two men drove off in different directions: James Cumming proceeding to Waterloo on his way to The Elms, and Robert directing his coachman to drive to "Mr. Rollo Croft's."

A few days after the evening of James Cumming's dinner with his adopted son at the Carlton, Robert

went down to the Elms to pay Trottie a farewell visit, before she started with her father and Miss Lipston for the Grange, Bramwood. Golden September was mellowing gradually towards the rich bronze shades of October, and Trottie was taking full advantage of the last few days of her boating year.

"Now this is fitting and in accordance with the panther-and-Sunday-school promise," said Robert, as he and Trottie started upstream in the Fairie, shortly after his arrival from town.

"Yes; it was good of you to come, Robert," assented Trottie, adding then, somewhat dreamily; "and it is beautiful, the river, I mean, is n't it? I wish Will were here to enjoy it, too."

"Ah, yes, poor old Will!"

Trottie frowned, and her pretty lips puckered slightly. Yet she herself had often used the same words in referring to the younger brother.

"I have n't heard anything of Will since he went wild-goose hunting in Fleet Street. I wonder how he 's getting on. Poor old chap, I am afraid he must be rather regretting the step by now."

"I don't think he will ever regret it; and if he does, it will be Fleet Street's fault and Fleet Street's loss, — at least, I mean, I think Will will succeed, and I feel sure he is more contented there than he would be in most positions."

Trottie's face was flushed now, and her soft eyes brightened as she spoke of Will, in strong, though scarcely conscious, resentment of the elder brother's

pitying tone. It seemed to her in some way all part of the patronising tone she fancied Robert had adopted to her. But Robert did not notice the flush, and, continuing to descant at some length on what he thought was the poor outlook of Will's life, he succeeded in chilling Trottie to an extent which startled the girl herself more than a little, and very much surprised the politician when he noticed it.

Beginning in his most pronounced " my-dear-little-Trottie " tone, he had come out that afternoon with a vague intention of sounding Trottie's feelings towards himself. But though unable to trace cause from effect regarding the chill he had introduced, he yet was quite diplomatic enough to see that this was not a favourable opportunity for making apparent his power to take what James Cumming had said was his " for the asking."

And during the next two months when Robert saw Trottie, as he did in the course of one or two short visits to the Grange, it frequently happened that when half inclined to make absolute his right of possession, some little trifle checked him in taking the final step.

There were two phases in Robert's life : the Westminster, working phase, the relief side of which Trottie personified; and the Odalisque phase of abandon, the essence and apex of which was Rollo Croft. The coming of reminiscent flashes of the one, into the clear white light of the other, was what, as often as anything else, staved off climax in Robert's relations with Trottie.

Two Dinners and a Supper

Towards the end of November, Robert Darley walked down the steps of a club in Pall Mall, where he had been one of the speakers at a semi-political dinner. Pausing on the lowest step, he drew a cigarette from his pocket, and, lighting it, stood listening to Big Ben's announcement of midnight. Robert looked weary with a weariness which did not suggest any desire for sleep.

"Twelve o'clock," he murmured to himself, as he looked up and down the cold, starlit road. "And I suppose I must go round to my rooms and grind at that wretched naval business. Gad, I wish — umph! Twelve o'clock. Rollo and Bèté will be at The Odalisque, and very likely — Yes, by Gad, I'll walk across the park and look in there for supper."

And Robert swung off down the quiet street, with shoulders squared, head thrown back, and every atom of weariness gone from his face to make way for the eager brightness of pleasurable anticipation.

At the same moment the figures of a tall man and a big dog moved out of the shadow on the opposite side of the road, where both had stood waiting for some time. The one, addressing the other in a low voice, said, "Come back here, fool dog; there's plenty of time. Go to heel, Satan, and stay there, as a well educated English dog should. Hush, you lunatic, you must n't bark in Pall Mall!"

Ten minutes afterwards, as Robert Darley strode along through the deserted park, the tall man with the dog followed him, walking some fifty or sixty yards behind him and on the grass beside the path.

Middle Greyness

Suddenly the man with the dog paused under a little fir-tree. Robert had reached an intersection of paths, and was being approached by two men, one facing him, the other at right angles and slightly in the rear. Robert saw only the man facing him, at whose request he felt in his pocket for a match. As he did so, a stinging blow fell on his head from behind, and stepping back, half-stunned, he saw the hands of the man who had asked him for a match, rising towards his throat.

"You brute!" he gasped. Then, mistily, he became conscious of a third presence; of a blow like that of a steam hammer, struck by the new arrival; and the air round him seemed to vibrate as the man who wanted a match fell like a log at his feet. At the same moment he heard a howl of pain behind him, and, turning, he saw a man vainly endeavouring to beat off a huge black dog, whose fangs were buried in the thick part of his leg.

"Drop that carrion, Satan," said a deep voice at Robert's side, — the voice of the third presence. And the dog, with a savage growl, opened his great jaws, leaving his prey to limp, moaning, away into the darkness.

"I hope these — things have n't hurt you much," said the man whom the dog obeyed.

Robert turned round again, the dazed feeling leaving him, as he replied with some warmth, "No, thanks to you." And then, glancing at the prostrate figure of the foot-pad who had gone down under his

questioner's hand, he added; "but it looks as though the hangman would never have a chance with this gentleman."

The black dog was eyeing the fallen man suspiciously. So, as Robert's rescuer bent down to investigate, he said, "Keep off, Satan; it is n't clean." Then, having with thumb and finger raised one of the foot-pad's eyelids, he suddenly drew his arm back, and, to Robert's surprise, dealt the man a swinging open-handed blow on the head. The thief sat up with a whine, and Satan growled ominously.

"I thought as much. The cur was shamming," said Satan's master, rising to his feet and addressing Darley. Then to the foot-pad he said, "Here, you! Get up and let me look at you."

Cringing away from the black dog, the thief rose and approached the man who had knocked him down.

"Humph!" ejaculated Robert's preserver, looking into the man's hang-dog face. "I don't think you 're worth taking to the police. In the Bush I 'd put a bullet through you. Here," — he turned to Robert, — "What do you think; shall we let him go?"

"By all means," said Robert; "I don't want him."

"No," murmured the tall man. And then, taking his hand from the foot-pad's shoulder, he said, "Now, my friend, you may retire. I 'll give you just two minutes before the dog starts. Vamoose! Get! Satan, come back here. I told you before it was n't clean!"

Robert smiled as the thief sped away into the darkness; and, turning to the man whose help had been so opportune, he said, "Might I ask which way you were going when — when we met?"

The stranger laughed quietly, and Robert noted mentally that his voice was rich and strong, and a pleasant one to hear.

"Well," he said, "I really was not making for any particular point, but just foraging about to make myself tired enough for bed."

"In that case, then, you will let me go with you to the gate. It's only a few minutes' walk from here, and I expect we shall find a cab there. If you could manage it, I should very much like you to come and have a chat and a little supper in my rooms."

"I should be delighted," said the owner of the dog. And a few minutes afterwards, the two were seated in one of the dingy looking vehicles which, all through the night, creep about the West End of London, and were rattling along towards the house Robert occupied in a street off Pall Mall.

Robert's servant had an appetising little supper laid for his master, and whilst discussing this, the two men chatted on all manner of subjects, till the young politician began to feel that his new friend was a man upon whose knowledge bounds could not well be set.

At last, the stranger, whom Robert learned was a new arrival from Australia, rose to leave, and his black dog, yawning regretfully over the fire before which he had been lying, rose too.

Two Dinners and a Supper

"Surely you will not think of going out now," said Robert. "It's close on three o'clock, and my man has made a room ready for you upstairs. It's raining outside, and I want to have an opportunity of finishing our chat to-morrow. Now do let me persuade you — er — by the way, my name is Darley. Might I ask —"

"Certainly. My name is Crossland, Arthur Crossland," said the tall man. "It's really very good of you to offer your hospitality, and the prospect of continuing this conversation would in itself be ample —"

"The goodness is in your thinking so. Just one moment, and I'll get Barlow to show you your room."

And a minute later the two parted at the door of Robert's sitting-room, the stranger following Barlow upstairs, whilst Robert returned to the room to finish his cigar alone, and to congratulate himself upon having made an exceedingly interesting acquaintance.

CHAPTER XVIII

FROM TO-DAY MY PRIVATE SECRETARY

"COME in!"

"Good-morning, sir."

"Good-morning. Thank you; you might put the coffee on the dressing-table, will you?"

"Yes, sir. My master wishes to know if ten o'clock will suit you for breakfast."

"Thank you, yes. Ten o'clock will suit me very well."

"Yes, sir."

Barlow, the perfect "man," disappeared silently from the room which had been assigned to his master's guest of the night before, or, rather, of the small hours of that morning.

"That, Satan," said the man from Australia, addressing his dog, who, having lain all night on the mat outside, had preceded Barlow when that worthy entered the room with the morning coffee,—"that is an institution which could not exist or be produced outside middle greyness. I refer, fool dog, as you might have guessed had you not been still more than half asleep, to the splendid piece of mechanism which just left the

room. You thought it was a man! Ah! that 's where you fall short, my friend; because you judge from appearances. That product of greyness is merely a perfectly constructed, ideally preserved, and absolutely unerring automaton. It does not live, of course, or it would at once become objectionable. It merely revolves in a never-ending circle of bowing, listening, and disappearing, varied occasionally by disappearing, listening, and bowing again. But this is the veriest trifling. We must wash, dog; because our mechanism brings us to a state of polite hunger at precisely ten o'clock this morning. What 's that you say, dog of few ideas? There 's no creek to wash in? True, but behind that curtain is a water-hole in miniature, and in this — But words are wasted on you, really. Here take this piece of bread and butter, and pretend it 's damper. I must have my tub."

Acting upon habit born of Bush life, the man called Crossland had reached for his pipe and lighted it, when he first woke in his son's house that morning. But that was an hour ago, and he had finished his smoke and was sitting on the bedside, attired chiefly in a dressing-gown, when Barlow had knocked at the door and followed Satan into the room. Now, in the intervals of a careful toilet, Crossland talked, as his habit was, to the kangaroo dog.

"We have not done so badly, dog, you and I," he said, whilst making a selection from the linen Robert had sent up for his use. "Not badly at all. It is barely a week since we landed in the dear old country,

and already we have slept under his roof. He has his father's old weakness for silk vests, dog, you notice that I presume. As I say we have slept here, and, if we play our hand properly, my friend, we shall continue to sleep here, and to enjoy the inestimable privilege of breathing the same rarefied greyness which is at intervals inhaled by the machine who brought coffee in. We shall —" the man's face grew suddenly set and serious — "and by the sunshine, Satan, we will make him win! Come on, fool dog; it 's three minutes to ten."

The man from the Bush found his host waiting his arrival, in the comfortable breakfast and sitting room downstairs.

"Good-morning, Mr. Darley," he said, on entering the room. "I hope you are feeling none the worse for the little accident which caused our meeting."

Robert stepped forward, and, shaking hands warmly with his new friend, said, "Not in the slightest; and I 'm feeling a great deal better for the meeting itself, I assure you. I don't often enjoy a talk as I enjoyed ours of last night."

"That is very kind of you. Probably you are not often attacked by foot-pads in Hyde Park, you see."

Robert smiled. "Well, no, not every evening," he said.

And then the two sat down facing each other at the breakfast-table, Satan having, after a quick criti-

cal glance round the room, stretched himself with a yawn of satisfaction on the hearth-rug. A few minutes passed in silence, whilst host and guest, to use an expressive colloquialism, "took stock" each of the other, in the clear light which morning brings. The younger man's method was obvious and transparent, showing admiration at every point. The older man's scrutiny was imperceptible, his summing up being shown in no way. The result was similar in both cases; but the one was impression, the other analysis. The man from Australia was pleased and satisfied; Robert was strongly impressed, almost fascinated. His contact with men really of the world had been practically nil. Here he was studying at close quarters the cultured man of parts who had drifted in vagabondage all up and down the world's back-bone, — a citizen of great Cosmopolis, a man large enough to comprehend the bigness of little things. Robert was grateful. But beyond that, he was deeply interested by a quiet strength which was new to him, — the strength of the man who knows, as distinguished from that of the man who has learned.

"I am afraid you are making very poor headway with those kidneys. May I give you something cold? There 's a *pâté* here which I think — May I?"

"Thanks, no," said Crossland. "I 'm really doing very well. I think, you know, that eating is mainly a matter of habit. I mean as to what and when one eats."

"As for instance?"

"Well, I think feeding in the morning should be — shall I say, Chippendale. But, no, that does not express what I mean exactly. Cold, thin, fresh cleanliness, crudeness, perhaps, seems to me part of the morning. Oranges, white vintage wines, coarse bread, apples, green things, amongst the edibles; straight-backed, thin-legged chairs, big windows, and a matted floor, for one's surroundings; and — you laugh. Perhaps this strikes you as ridiculous."

Robert was laughing, though admiringly; and the black dog, looking up from his place by the fire, grunted in an undecided way as one who, whilst prepared to dispute the politician's right to be amused, was yet a little struck himself by the incongruity of his master's remarks. Crossland looked confidentially at the dog, and his eyes said plainly, "Don't you be alarmed, my friend. I understand the game I 'm playing." So Satan subsided, blinking contentedly at the fire; and Robert, still smiling, said: —

"No, you should not have allowed me to interrupt you. I was very much interested, but I was surprised; because I did n't think you studied such things in Australia."

"I don't know that it is altogether a custom of the country," said the elder man. "I 'm inclined to think it 's merely one of my most foolish fancies, thrust into unaccustomed publicity by your kindly anxiety regarding my handling of the kidneys."

"Ah! Mr. Crossland, I should very much like you

to meet my friend, Rollo Croft. If you will allow me, I must bring you two together; Croft would be your most ardent disciple in such matters as the ethics of feeding. However, may I offer you a cigarette? We can talk more comfortably over our coffee, then; and I can see you will not eat any more."

"Thank you. Let me give you a light. Ah, I notice you are an epicure in your smoking. This is the first pure Turkish I have tasted for years."

"Yes, I thought they were fairly good. Henceforth I shall know it."

Robert rose and took up a position near the fire; Satan having, with frigid courtesy, retired to the other end of the fender. In some respects, Robert's perceptions were a little blunt, and there were aspects of his nature not noticeably marked by refinement. His instincts were, however, mostly those of a gentleman; and his University life, apart from anything else, had taught him generally to know a clean-run man when he met one. Consequently he was very anxious not to hurt in any way the feelings of the man who had saved him from what might have been murder, and must have been violent robbery, on the occasion of their first meeting. Yet he wanted to show his gratitude, and to make some return for a service rendered. All this he recognised as he stood by the fire smoking, and listening to his guest's easy talk. What he did not recognise, and was strongly moved by, was the fact that the personality of this chance friend of his was unlike that of any one else he had

met; that this man Crossland looked and spoke and thought, just as he, Robert, considered a man should look, speak, and think; that his strong natural grip of, and familiarity with, men and things was something he himself unreservedly admired, — in fact, that he was deeply interested in, and by, the man from Australia.

"I feel that I am interrupting the most important part of a busy man's work — his thinking," said Crossland.

Satan sniffed contemptuously, and said, "Nonsense!" as plainly as a kangaroo dog can say anything.

"Not at all, not at all, I assure you," began Robert. "I was really thinking about — well, rather a knotty point, Mr. Crossland."

"So I assumed, and therefore dreaded the possibly distracting influence of my presence."

"No, that you need not dread. You see it 's like this: Some one does me a great favour, practically saves my life, and I am naturally grateful."

"So far then," said the man from the Bush quietly, "there are no difficulties."

"Well, then, of course I want to show my gratitude in some way."

"The existence of the desire is surely better than any demonstration."

"Hardly, I think. However, suppose the man who did me a service, having for a little while given me the benefit of his society, intended then to go

away. I am in the dark as to his desires, tastes, or wants. How can I best prove my gratefulness?"

"I should say the man understood, appreciated, and accepted, in which case proof would of course be superfluous."

"But supposing I want to show it?"

"Then, I should say, the pleasure of having partaken of your hospitality would make your man more than even, and convinced."

Robert smiled. "Surely we are merely fencing," he said.

"Itself a polite and useful occupation, I have always understood."

The conversation had become annoying to the kangaroo dog, who at this point, left the fire and, licking his master's hand in passing, walked under the table and lay down there.

"I see you are determined to give me no assistance," said Robert, after a slight pause. "So I must tell you just what has entered my head, in the hope that, if it be out of place, you will at least credit me with a good motive in what I am going to say."

"That it would be very strange if I did not do." Crossland's eyes were lowered and fixed on his cigarette end at the time, so that Robert did not see the momentary flash of expectancy which lit them up.

"Last night," continued Robert, "you allowed me to gather, Mr. Crossland, that, as a new arrival in London, circumstances made it advisable for you to at once find some source of income. I received the

impression too that you were not known at all in England, and might therefore experience some difficulty in this direction."

The older man bowed, as, glancing at his watch, Robert said, "By Jove, I shall have to curtail our chat this morning; I've an appointment to keep in an hour. However, I was going to say, I am a member of Parliament, and am supposed to be playing for success. You smile. Well, I will go so far as to say that I am playing for it, or at least I want it. To cut short a long story, Mr. Crossland, for I have been thinking about this since early this morning, it seems to me that if on terms which I have no doubt we could satisfactorily settle, you would care to take a position as my private secretary, two important ends would be served. You would at once obtain the source of income which circumstances place you in need of, and I should gain the service and counsel of a man of the world, whose knowledge and experience of things generally would be of infinite value to me."

"You are very good," murmured Crossland, "and have put this very kindly; but —"

"Now don't say that," interrupted Robert. "There's no question of goodness, and the matter of secretarial duties being new to you is of no importance. Mere clerical assistance is not what I want. You see you cannot undo our talk of last night, and therefore, some of your insight into diplomatic life is known to me. I want some one whose grip of things, just such

as yours, would enable me to regard him at times as a second self politically; to obtain from him advice and assistance in all matters connected with my life as a member; and to look to him to strengthen my hand generally, as one who is playing for success. Now what do you think, Mr. Crossland? At all events this should be worth a trial."

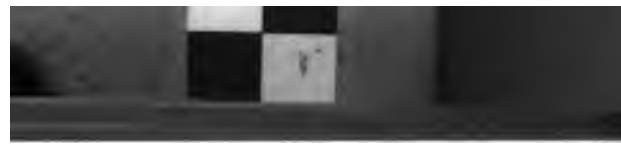
The man from the Bush was silent for a moment, during which his eyes, resting on those of his dog, Satan, were filled with a light of satisfaction that was almost triumph. Then he raised his head and looked up at Robert, every line on whose face showed eagerness and expectancy.

"Mr. Darley," he said slowly, "I am more than happy to accept this offer; and if my efforts can be worth anything, I am sure you will not find cause to regret having made it."

"I 'm certain of that," said Robert, speaking with evident sincerity. "And now, if you don't mind, since I am pressed for time, we will at once go into a little detail."

And dropping into the masterful tone which was more characteristic of him than his conversation had hitherto been, Robert proceeded to lay all necessary details before his new secretary; to arrange the matter of remuneration; and generally to run through what, with most men, would have been a matter of far more deliberation.

"And now," he said, at the end of a duologue which had consisted chiefly of rapidly spoken explana-



tions on one side, and acquiescent nods on the other, — "now, if you will excuse me, I will run away. I am later already than I thought. Would you mind touching that bell, and we 'll have Barlow in. Barlow, I think, you will find personified usefulness; he certainly is to me."

At the end of ten seconds this paragon had silently introduced himself; and, with a wave of his hand, Robert said, "This is Barlow, Mr. Crossland. Barlow, in future you will kindly regard all orders from this gentleman as orders from me."

The servant bowed without the smallest inflection of an expression crossing his face.

"The room Mr. Crossland occupied last night you will make ready for his permanent use, please. You will see to sending for baggage and that sort of thing; and, from to-day, Barlow, Mr. Crossland is my private secretary. That will do, Barlow."

The man bowed again, and left the room with dignified obsequiousness. Five minutes afterwards, having left his new secretary in the study which, for a time at all events, was to be the scene of their joint labours, Robert Darley hurried out of the house to keep his appointment, murmuring to himself as he stepped into his waiting hansom, "That 's the best morning's work I 've done for a good while."

As Robert drove down Pall Mall, Arthur Crossland, the man from Australia, his great dog at his side, walked slowly round the big, richly furnished library which served the politician as a study. As usual when

in no one else's presence, Crossland addressed himself to the dog who was to him so like a second self, — the silent and perhaps most natural half of the man's personality.

"Did you hear all that, Satan?" he muttered, as he gazed critically about the room, from its huge bay-windows to its shelf-lined walls and crowded tables. "Did you catch it all, dog? 'From to-day my private secretary!'" Then, unconsciously echoing Robert's own expressed sentiment, he added, "Not a bad morning's work, I fancy. Not bad at all for one day. And now we begin to work in the greyness, you and I, dog. We begin to live our humbug selves, and to put our real selves into him."

There was not much trace of the man of the Warroo gunyah in Crossland's face as he said this. Calm, strong determination showed in his every glance, in his alert, erect bearing, and in the very movements of his nervous hands as he touched and examined various articles scattered about on Robert's tables.

Suddenly he started forward as his eyes fell on a beautiful little miniature which stood, in a setting of gold and rubies, on the writing-table before the window. In a moment the man's face seemed drawn into rigid lines and hollows, his eyes were staring, and the blood seemed to have receded from his very finger-ends. Lifting the jewelled portrait, as a man lifts a heavy weight, he sank into a chair by the writing-table, his hands stretched out between his knees.

"My God, Mary!"

The man collapsed utterly, and the words he spoke were a moan, the cry of a man in pain unbearable.

"His mother, of course; but — Mary, as God is in heaven, where you are, I am here to give him only the part of me you loved. Mary, dear, I — Ugh!"

The strong man's body shook from head to foot, till the chair he sat on creaked and jarred against the writing-table. The change of expression in his face was a contortion, and his breath stopped short, as, rising to his feet, Crossland said, quietly: —

"Come in."

Barlow had knocked at the door, and now entered the room.

"Mr. Rollo Croft, sir, to see my master. Do you wish to see him, sir?"

"Ah! Mr. Croft, I think you said. No, Barlow, Mr. Croft does not know me. You might tell him, if you will, that Mr. Darley will return here at about five, and remain in till eight o'clock, when I believe he goes to the club to dine."

"Yes, sir."

The servant closed the door as he left the study, and the man Crossland smiled quietly, as, turning to his dog, he said, "I think, Satan, that, taken as the earliest effort of a raw beginner, that was fairly well managed. Eh? Hang the dog, why don't you speak?"

Writing to Trottie from the smoking-room of his

club late that night, Robert Darley wound up his letter by saying, "You might tell the pater, if you will, Trottie, that I think I have discovered a perfect treasure of a private secretary. I 've engaged him, anyhow, and I think his wide knowledge of things generally should prove of great service to me. My meeting with him in Hyde Park late last night was quite a little adventure; but of that I will tell you when I come down next week. Meanwhile, Arthur Crossland is his name, and Cosmopolitan, as far as I can make out, is his nationality."

CHAPTER XIX

ROLLO CROFT ON THE NAVAL ESTIMATES

CHRISTMAS had come and gone, and in the fine old garden which sloped away from all sides of the Grange, Bramwood, tiny points of virgin greenness were everywhere announcing the coming of spring and winter's approaching death. But the season of cold was fighting grimly to prolong its existence, whilst the advance of spring was coy and hesitating. Therefore, chilly mortals, though gratefully welcoming the green things of the earth, and flirting surreptitiously with the sunshine, still whispered vows of fidelity to fires of coal, and lingered lovingly over such functions as afternoon tea.

Of the many pleasant incidents in the life of a well ordered country house, few can be more thoroughly enjoyed than that mystic meal which is not really a meal but a devotional rite. For one thing, its observance is confined exclusively to that period of the day which, except to the slothful cynic who prefers sleeping hours to all others, is more entirely satisfactory than any other.

One sips tea and munches toast in a haphazard way, whilst dallying with or postponing the more seri-

ous features of the day, such as dressing for dinner. One accepts cake from fair hands, with no thought of indigestion, whilst mapping out a programme for to-morrow — blissfully unconscious of the fact that to-morrow is to bring a downpour of sleet. One lazily twiddles a teaspoon, whilst comparing notes on the points of that day's sport, — a proceeding always so much more enthralling than is the sport itself.

Then the delightful freedom with which the sexes mingle over this admirable function, is a pleasure unattainable under other circumstances. The tea-table is essentially the altar of femininity's own temple, yet is mere man permitted, nay, assisted, to worship at the same shrine. He is admitted to womankind's inner sanctum, and, at her own devotions, heaven feminine, in sweet abandon, waits with her own dainty hands upon earth masculine.

The long drawing-room of the Grange looked its very best under such circumstances as these; and on this occasion when dusk was turning to darkness, on an early March day, the apartment over which Trottie nominally presided was one pleasant to enter and hard to leave.

Standing and sitting near the fire, were James Cumming, Rollo Croft, Dr. Gordon of Bramwood, one or two young and more or less shining political lights, and a few of the district's best-known male representatives. Sitting in state behind a beaming and benevolent-looking urn, Mrs. Venner dispensed creature comforts on her millionaire brother's behalf;

and, in different parts of the room, Maud and Hetty Venner, Miss Lipston, Trottie, the doctor's wife, and other ladies, held court and received homage.

In a few days James Cumming and his daughter would move Londonwards, to spend a few days in town before leaving for the Riviera. Robert Darley had been due at the Grange some days before; but an important meeting had detained him, and now he was expected in Bramwood that evening, and was being talked of by most of the tea and toast devotees.

"Certainly a brilliant achievement, this speech of Mr. Darley's," said dapper little Dr. Gordon, addressing James Cumming, before whom he stood on the hearth-rug, looking like an Italian greyhound facing a somewhat overfed mastiff.

"A very brilliant achievement, Dr. Gordon, and a very well-earned success." James Cumming's right hand was hidden in his waistcoat, and he, as it were, gave permission for congratulation, — signified that expressions of feeling regarding his adopted son's actions might now be made by the people generally.

"Has any one been privileged to see Robert's wonderful secretary?" asked Trottie, glancing first at Rollo Croft and then at her tea-cup.

The artist, who would have ridiculed the notion or any one possessing the power to pique him, was now devoting himself, with a tact worthy better things, to the task of endeavouring to pique Trottie. In this he relied largely upon the assistance of the younger Miss Venner. Croft had once, by accident, overheard a

remark of Maud Venner's, in which she had referred to "that too delightful Mr. Rollo Croft." He never forgot a circumstance of this kind, and, when not exerting himself for Trottie's more immediate benefit, was always pleased, motives of policy apart, to receive Miss Venner's very ill-concealed admiration.

The artist carefully refrained from accepting Trottie's open question as being addressed to himself; and, one of the most shining of the young politicians, looking up from a long and careful study of James Cumming's boots, remarked: —

"I really don't think any one has, Miss Cumming. He's something of a mystery; but I believe Croft's been so far favoured as to hear his voice. Is n't that so, Croft?"

All eyes being turned towards the artist, he smilingly admitted the impeachment, and said, "Yes, I have heard his voice once or twice, when I've called at Robert's place; but, oddly enough, I've never met the man. I understand from Robert that he is a paragon as a secretary, and a native, so I think Robert said, of the South Pole or Van Diemen's Land — I'm really not sure which."

"At least, Mr. Croft, we may learn from you what the paragon's voice is like, though we cannot hope to guess of his appearance, for the present, at all events."

Mrs. Venner was the speaker, and, turning towards her, the artist said, "Oh, his voice, Mrs. Venner, is superb; deep and strong, and suggestive of Emperors, or coal-heavers, you know."

James Cumming smiled heavily, and suggested that particulars might be gathered from Robert himself, later on; Dr. Gordon supplicated at Mrs. Venner's foot-stool for a further supply of tea, and Rollo Croft turning to answer a question put to him by Maud Venner, the conversation became once more general.

"Oh, Mr. Croft," said Miss Venner, bent on re-establishing the temporarily lost *tête-à-tête* tone of her chat with the artist, "I do wish you would explain all about Robert's last success to me."

"Do you refer to the Bayswater triumph, Miss Venner?" asked Croft, gravely.

"I really don't know; but I suppose that must be it. I mean the great speech Robert made last night, and about which every one is talking so fearfully learnedly to-day."

"But, surely, Miss Venner, you cannot seriously contemplate so rash an act as the study of political details."

"No, I don't want to study them; but it is so shocking not to know anything about what every one is talking of, don't you think? I have to sit next to that Mr. Hindmarsh at dinner to-night; and he's simply tremendous, you know, a rising statesman, I believe, and that sort of thing."

"Ah! How very sad! And really, to look at the gentleman, one would not suspect that he in the least realises the serious nature of his position."

"Mr. Croft, I believe you are joking."

"Not at all, Miss Venner, I assure you. I am

only surprised and hurt at the idea of your coming into contact with anything so awful as political details."

"But are they really so dreadful?"

"Unspeakably. But if you are really fixed in your determination, why not imbibe knowledge at the feet of your friend, Mr. — er — Mindharsh, I think you said?"

"Now, I'm convinced you are making fun of me, Mr. Croft. I really shall begin to think you are never serious about anything."

"My dear Miss Venner, are you? I think things become really too absurd if one tries to take them seriously; and then it 's such fearful waste of time, you know."

"But really, Mr. Croft, do tell me about this speech. I gave myself a perfectly dreadful headache over trying to understand it in the 'Standard' this morning."

"I am so very sorry, believe me; but how could one expect to read a newspaper without being ill afterwards. However, now I come to think of it, I am not sure whether, after all, you are not wiser in appealing to me, Miss Venner, than to your friend, Mr. Blindmouse."

"Hush, Mr. Croft. You are dreadful. I am sure he will hear you."

"Do you mean the rising statesman, Miss Venner? Oh, I don't mind. He is very welcome to any little thing he may learn from me. I was about to say that

perhaps it is safer for you to come to me for information about politics, because, you see, in approaching any one like Mr. Rindarsh, whose sad case you have mentioned, you can never be sure that you are not appealing to a man who has some slight knowledge of politics, and is therefore, of course, certain to give you false impressions. As I need hardly say, I have not the faintest shadow of knowledge of any single detail of our national ugliness, and therefore, knowing nothing about politics, cannot possibly mislead you regarding them."

Miss Venner glanced across the room to Trottie, in the benevolent hope that that young lady might realise how thoroughly she, Maud Venner, was enjoying herself.

"Please go on, Mr. Croft. I am beginning to feel quite learned already."

"Ah!" said Croft, bending seriously towards her, "I beg you won't attach any blame to me in connection with that feeling. I am assured that it is merely the after-effects of the 'Standard's' baneful influence, or perhaps — Did you sit next to Mr. Marshmind at luncheon?"

"Don't be wicked, Mr. Croft, and do go on with the story —"

"Thank you!"

"I mean the explanation."

"Let me see, we were talking about crime and politics — Oh, politics, of course. Yes, well, I am given to understand — you may have noticed that

expression in the 'Standard,' if so, they borrowed it from me — I am led to understand that Robert belongs to a thing called a party. In justice to my friend, I must add that I believe this is through no intentional fault of his. The party consists of a number of hardened politicians, who, I should mention, are banded together for the purpose of maintaining our naval supremacy. That is not swearing, Miss Venner. It 's an expression of Robert's, and I believe he pretends to know what it means as a sentence. I know it is used to signify the support of the English navy, — the encouragement of a mythical class referred to by early historians as, 'our gallant tars,' and the upholding generally of Rule Britannia, and that sort of thing, you know."

Miss Venner nodded, and proceeding gravely, Croft said: —

"Well, Miss Venner, — I would ask you to regard my occasional pauses as openings for a little subdued applause, — I have to tell you something in all confidence, which sounds rather like disloyalty to my friend. The fact is, Robert has been a little rash on one or two occasions, and the result is, I am afraid, that his present position is even more serious than that of your friend Mr. — er — Yes, thank you, — Mr. Kindarsh. He is in point of fact, a rising politician, and that, as far as I can make out, in rather an advanced stage. Consequently some of the most serious of the responsibilities of the Rule Britannia party, have been forced upon him, and the newspapers, in a very heartless

manner, publish whole columns about the poor fellow."

Croft paused a moment to glance in Trottie's direction, and cleverly disguised a yawn as, continuing, he said: —

"At the present time the Rule Britannia party has reached some serious crisis in its existence, which affects or is affected by — reference to the 'Standard' will make this point clear — the Naval Estimates."

"But, Mr. Croft, what — "

"No, I beg you, Miss Venner, don't ask me where the Naval Estimates grow, or whether they are recognised in society, because I have n't the faintest idea what they are like to look at. However, this crisis — a crisis, you know, is a thing used at general elections, and political dinners, and so forth, and is of course a very serious and lamentable thing — this crisis was to be finally dealt with, and destroyed, or staved off, I believe, by a great meeting at a place called Bayswater. The ringleader of Robert's party, known I believe as its chief, was to make some special effort on this occasion, and do something towards securing for his circle the approval of a section of the lower orders called the British public. I am told some dissension existed amongst the members of the Britannia party, several of whom thought their chief was a little out of date, and regarded Robert as a more accomplished player. Am I boring you very much, Miss Venner?"

"Mr. Croft, no! I am deeply interested."

"Well, three days ago, this chief of Robert's fell

out of his cab, being I am afraid under the influence of Naval Estimates at the time, and broke his neck, or his leg — his leg, I think it was. It is thought that some admirer of Robert's may have been responsible for this; but personally, I confess I am inclined towards the Naval Estimates theory as being the more probable. At all events, the chief's neck being broken, he was of course confined to his bed, and — Ah, yes. I beg your pardon; his leg. Well, he could not appear, and the party was in horrible perplexity. Then Robert was appealed to, and, as I think, with reckless heroism stepped into the breach. The position of the party, even before its chief's neck gave way, was a doubtful one, and very grave. Robert, however, who appears to have been sunk to a deplorable depth in knowledge of the whole affair, took charge of the Bayswater gathering of the Rule Britannia clans last night, and made a speech that is described as the most telling address which has been delivered in London for years. What it told, goodness only knows; and goodness is coy and reticent where politics are concerned. Robert not only completely demolished the crisis, but, so I understand, placed the Britannia party in a stronger position than it has held since the days of the late and much lamented Neptune, who, I am told, was, under the auspices of the Foreign Office, responsible for its inauguration. The chief with the game leg sinks now into comparative obscurity, and, to all intents and purposes, Robert succeeds to the ringleadership. This, of course is a brilliant

achievement, and means that Robert will be privileged to work like a horse, and be abused like a pickpocket in the newspapers. In fact, he has scored a distinct success."

"Oh, thank you so much, Mr. Croft. I understand it beautifully now, and I am sure the 'Standard' would not have taught me in a year."

"No, that 's the worst of it. You see, the 'Standard' people, like your friend — er — oh, Hindmarsh, is it? — like Mr. Hindmarsh, are unfortunate enough to know something about politics, and therefore — By Jove, here 's the conquering hero himself!"

At this moment Robert Darley entered the room, and promptly became the centre of attention.

"And now," murmured Croft, "I will subside into my native insignificance, and allow you, Miss Venner, to share in the light of the lion's countenance, as I know you are longing to do."

"Nonsense, Mr. Croft; you must n't say such horrid things," said the girl in a whisper. "You know I 've been immensely interested, and don't want to go away at all. But I confess it will be charming to show off my learning to Mr. Hindmarsh this evening."

"Ah, yes. The most correct form of all is to refer to the speech as a splendid oratorical effort; but, simply, a brilliant speech, will pass very well you know — How are you, Robert? I congratulate you, old man. We have all been talking about you for hours."

"And your splendid speech," said James Cumming, solemnly.

Rollo Croft on the Naval Estimates

"Your magnificent address!"

"Charming success!"

"Brilliant achievement!"

"Delightful affair!"

"Last night's triumph!"

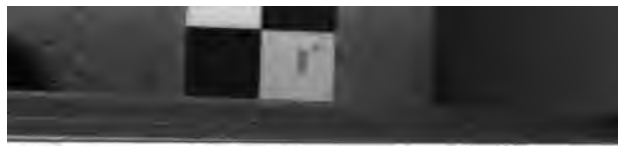
"We've most of us been talking of your wonderful secretary, too, Robert. Does he come in for any of the glory?" said Trottie.

"Yes, every one wants to hear about the man from the Antarctic, Robert," added Croft.

"By Jove, yes!" ejaculated Maud Venner's "rising statesman." "Tell us about the secretary, Darley. Does he include inspiration of oratory amongst his secretarial perfections?"

Robert was standing in the middle of the room during this shower of questions and congratulations, and the exhilaration of triumph and achievement shone out of his bright eyes, showing itself on his smiling lips, and in the very pose of his shapely head. As the words of the last speaker reached him, their slightly satirical tone seemed to jar against the rushing air of success he brought with him; and a look of annoyance, almost of anger, flashed into his eyes. This was gone in a moment, however, and with smiling glances cast in all directions, Robert acknowledged first one greeting and then another, with a hurried sentence or a nod.

"I don't know where to begin," he said, "to answer your simple little questions; but I'm much obliged for your sympathy. My secretary 's a treasure; and last night's speech has practically given me an



under-secretaryship. I think that covers most of the ground, does it not? And now I must run away, if you'll excuse me. I've been up all night and moving about all day."

"I congratulate you, Robert, on this, your latest and most striking success."

James Cumming withdrew his hand from his waistcoat, and a buzz of sympathy went all round the room.

"Unprecedented success is now the correct phrase to adopt, Miss Venner," said Rollo Croft.

"Robert, dear, it's splendid." Trottie was at her brother's side, sympathetic pride and delight beaming from her eyes.

"The party should be entirely in your own hands, my dear Darley." The rising statesman had spoken.

"You make us very proud," murmured Miss Lipston, blushing violently in her own excessive meekness.

"Robert," said Rollo Croft, solemnly, "you have succeeded beyond all hope of redemption."

CHAPTER XX

FROM FLEET STREET TO BUSHEY PARK

When Robert Darley came down to the Grange after what his friend Croft called "the Bayswater triumph," the Cumming household was on the eve of moving Londonwards for a few days' stay in the metropolis before setting out to spend the early spring in Southern France. Robert could not now spare much time away from Westminster, and his having arrived at the Grange three days later than was at first arranged, cut his visit down to a mere week's end in the country.

The Saturday and Sunday were pleasant days to the young politician, and to all the party. Then, on Monday, came a general exodus of guests and preparations for departure. Rollo Croft was the only visitor left at the Grange; and on Tuesday he started for London with James Cumming, Miss Lipston, Trottie, and Robert. The good Miss Lipston had long ceased to occupy the position of governess to Trottie; but there were many little ways in which she was useful to James Cumming, and Trottie still required a chaperone of some kind.

Middle Greyness

Arrived in London, the party separated. Robert made off at once to his chambers, and, as Trottie laughingly put it, to his "wonderful secretary." James Cumming, on business bent, proceeded citywards to call on his lawyers. Rollo Croft, murmuring something about not having had a brush in his hand for a week, left in a hansom for West Kensington; and Trottie, occupying with Miss Lipston the brougham sent from The Elms to meet the party, set out in a westerly direction for an afternoon's shopping.

Stepping into the brougham outside a Regent Street drapery palace, Trottie caught a glimpse of Will Darley, whom she had not even heard from for some months. A sudden wave of sisterly fondness, bringing with it considerable self-reproach, as she remembered how seldom her thoughts had been occupied by thoughts of Will and his outside life, made Trottie forget her surroundings and cry out, "Will! Will!" to the amazement of the footman and the horror of the decorous Miss Lipston. Her purpose was served, however. Will heard her voice, and, swinging round in some surprise, was at her side in an instant.

"My dear little Trottie," he said, "this is a stroke of luck."

Then Trottie insisted on his taking a seat in the brougham, and Miss Lipston, having recovered from the shock occasioned her by Trottie's want of propriety, joined that young lady in endeavouring to give a happy half hour to the man from Fleet Street. But, as Trottie afterwards said, "Three people cannot

talk, can they?" And there were many questions she wanted to put to Will. A little later, when the carriage stood in the midst of an apparently hopeless tangle in Piccadilly Circus, Will asked how long the party would remain at The Elms before leaving for the Riviera.

"Just three days, and I shall go for a walk in the Park with Lass, each morning," whispered Trottie.

"Lass" was Trottie's favourite spaniel, and "the Park" meant Bushey Park to James Cumming's daughter and to Will.

Then Will's little glimpse into the life he had left was brought to an end, Trottie and Miss Lipston starting for home, after putting their guest down in Trafalgar Square. Trottie had made that whispered allusion to her walks in the Park, because she wanted to see Will, and to hear about his life; and she knew it would not be pleasant for him to call at The Elms. The girl had no consciousness of anything clandestine, when she set out with Lass next morning to walk through Bushey Park, though she was moved to hope that Will should have taken her hint in the spirit in which she had given it.

The main avenue at Bushey Park is always beautiful, even on a Bank Holiday; and on this morning, when Trottie walked slowly into it with her spaniel, a thick white frost was only gradually disappearing in the mellowing sunshine of a late winter's morning. So the noble chestnuts and the gracious, graceful elms dripped sprays of bright water from every branch, and

all across the grass, on either side of the avenue, the hoar frost glittered and sparkled in the sunshine, as Trottie gazed about between the tree-trunks, and talked in a desultory way to Lass.

"Do you think he will come, Lass?" she said, as, walking immediately behind a group of three graceful deer, she crossed the road beyond the lake; "or will he think it too much trouble, Lass?"

Now at that moment, Trottie, Lass, and the three deer were the only living objects visible from end to end of the long avenue; and a beautiful picture they formed, set in a very beautiful frame. Thirty seconds afterwards, Will entered the Park by its Teddington gate, and had the pleasure of gazing at this picture with nearly half a mile of avenue as its focus. When the two met, they turned in the direction of Hampton Court, and, arriving later at the palace, strolled through its long picture gallery, and talked of all that had happened since their last meeting.

"It does seem funny, Trottie," said Will, as they paused to rest in one of the deep old window-seats which overlook the Long Water, "that you and I, who have been together all our lives, should not see one another for months, and should meet then in Bushey Park and take refuge in Hampton Court as a place for conversation. But I know you understand. Of course I might call at The Elms. There is nothing to prevent it. Only it would not be very pleasant to me just now to meet your father."

"Of course I understand, Will, and you know I

should be glad to see you anywhere. Besides, one could not wish for a more charming place in which to meet one's brother, I am sure."

And Trottie laughed happily as she glanced at the gilt letters which signified that the apartment they occupied had been "Henry VIII., Bedchamber."

"We see very little of Robert now," she continued; "so I cannot give you much news of him that the newspapers have not told you. He is entirely in the hands of a private secretary, of whom he thinks an immense deal, and who, I believe, bullies him dreadfully. But his success is splendid, is it not? He seems to rush on so from one point to another, and to be able to do anything."

"Yes, I am awfully glad he is climbing the tree so quickly. Of course we always said Robert would be a great man."

"Yes, we did. But, Will, you have n't begun to tell me about yourself and Fleet Street, and it is getting late already. Do tell me how you are getting on, and what you are doing?"

Will smiled; and Trottie noticed, with mental comments, that this was not the smile his face had worn when he came striding out of Teddington station on his return from Oxford. It was rather a sad smile, and of itself served to call Trottie's attention to the fact that her cousin's cheeks were not such smooth outlines as they had been in the Oxford days. There were hollows now which left shadows in the face. They did not enhance Will's personal appearance;

but, whilst in a flash noticing it all, Trottie realised that she liked that rather wan smile, better than the old indolent, dreamy look of happy indifference. Though not of the confident kind, and suggestive rather of hard knocks received than of success, it was yet the smile of one who touched things as well as dreamed of them, and that made it stronger, and, therefore, more pleasing to the girl.

"It is rather a severe strain, Trottie, to turn from Robert and his achievements to myself and my wanderings in Lower Bohemia," said Will; "and to any one but yourself I should find it painful, because of the standards by which men are judged. You see I no longer rise superior to the judgment of mankind at large. Its value has been rather forced on me of late, and I have suffered to much about the extent that I suppose all men suffer, when they begin by ignoring public opinion. Still, my own views of success and its value are gauged by the same standards, and remain the same, as when we talked about these things before."

"Poor old Will!" said Trottie, stroking the sinewy, sensitive-looking hand which rested on the oak window-shutters beside her.

"No, no, Trottie! Don't pity me, dear! There's really no need for pity; only — I like to tell you everything. But I am content enough, you know, and, even as things look now, would not change places with Rob — with the people who are rising and live in grooves, you know. Yes, I know," continued

Will, in response to a thought which, if existing in her mind, was certainly not expressed by Trottie, "I know you are thinking of all that has been achieved in a groove, whilst I have apparently done nothing outside it."

"No, Will, indeed I was not thinking of that." Will continued, without looking at Trottie, who was shaking her pretty head in denial.

"Well, of course all that is obviously true; but yet I have even now learned much that I should not have learned in a groove, and that will be of great service to me later on. You know that when I found Hinton had gone to South America, I had to settle down alone. Hinton, you know, has struck a rich vein of material in the South, and I expect will be a good while away. Rooms in one of the Temple Inns were what I had thought of in the Oxford days; but at the time I could n't find any there that were within my means, — you know I have to be very economical now, Trottie, — so I went a little farther afield. Finally I found a couple of rooms in Holborn. You know that row of funny old houses with overhanging storeys, opposite Grays Inn Road?"

Trottie nodded, though her knowledge of the "funny old houses" was misty in the extreme.

"Well, I rented a couple of rooms away up near the sky, and the ground entrance to them is within a few yards of those old houses. Then I began to see editors, or rather to call upon editors; and — I began to learn things."

"What sort of things, Will? How to write for newspapers, do you mean?"

"No, not exactly how to write for newspapers," said Will, hesitatingly. "That is all to come. I learned a little as to how not to write for newspapers; but I think the first thing of any importance I learned, was, that London is full of brains and that brains are very cheap — cheaper, for instance, than chops and beer and 'bus fares, 'bus fares in the aggregate, you know. I learned that London is crowded with men, each of whom has a certain amount of brain, and a healthy appetite. They all want to sell the former for the means of satisfying the latter, and are all ready to do anything within the bounds of reason, — many without the bounds. They are prepared to do anything, and London does not want them or the anything they are willing to do. It only wants men who are ready and able to do one thing which the others cannot do. If that one thing is done by nobody else at all, then the man who can do it becomes a really great success, the vogue in fact. If the one thing is merely doing something done by others, better than they can do it, then London will give in return what is called a comfortable living. If one simply does a thing that others do, as well and no better than they do it, then one stands amongst the crowd in the street, who wait for London to give them an opening in which they, with the ruck, may earn the means of satisfying their healthy appetites. I learned that quickly; but, for me, it was a good deal."

Will paused, with rather a tired look on his face; and Trottie stroked his hand with the end of her fur boa. "Poor old Will!" she said, again unconsciously echoing the epithet which boys at Rugby had applied to dreamy Will Darley.

"Then I learned that calling on editors was a mistake; as distinctly a mistake and as much waste of time, as seeking advice from people in the swim. The moment a man gets into the swim, even though his boat be a very tiny one, he separates himself by a big gulf from the crowd on the tow-path. He may be willing and anxious to help the men on the tow-path with advice. But, do you know, Trottie, all he can say is, 'Peg away, you fellows; keep pegging away, and a boat will pick you up one of these days.' It is not that he has a feeling of contempt for the men in the crowd he has left, unless he is a cad; but, perhaps without knowing it, he yet is aware of the fact that the men on the tow-path cannot be taken along by the men in the swim. He knows they must find boats for themselves, and that unless an unfortunate train of circumstances leads to their getting a chill on the river-bank in the evening, and dying, — unless this happens, they will, if capable of using the sculls when opportunity arrives, sooner or later, find a boat for themselves, and so get into the stream. Of course there are individual cases where a man may be helped to find a boat, and then to make his way along the stream with the rest. But in the majority of cases, when there is any helping done,

it is simply a matter of finding a man a lounge chair on a steam launch, and carrying him along in the swim without his ever knowing or showing whether he could manage his own craft if he had one. That is only a way of entering a groove."

"Will, you are a dear boy," said Trottie. And then, looking out of the window again, she waited in silence. Her remark might by many have been considered lacking in relevancy, and superfluous as a comment on the subject under discussion. But Will seemed pleased, and said: —

"Thank you, little Troddles!" Continuing then, he said, "Well, then, I ceased calling on editors. Take them all round, they are a long-suffering class, Trottie. They are rather cruel by letter, at times; but they are mostly courteous enough personally; and, were it not for the fact that there is a certain amount of humbug connected with their positions, their persecution by men like me would be really a brutal thing. As it is, I think it is a mistake. So I started writing, and sending what I wrote to the editors; leaving it at their offices instead of asking to see them. Of course I have lost some work in that way; but, generally speaking, it is returned within a day or so. If the things do not come back within a week, I begin to grow interested in them. They lend quite an exciting element of expectancy to my life, and give me something to look for. Now and again, with a considerable gap between the now and the again, I get a proof, and something appears. Those

events, of course, create possibilities which, in a fervid imagination like mine, a week of steady 'declineds' is hardly sufficient to crumble. So I jog along, and, gradually, I am learning that in writing for one paper it is well to take a light, bantering view of all things, — regard London as a monstrous playground, and Parliament as a practical joke. In writing for another, one drops into a calm, despairing line, and speaks of 'the existing order of things.' For another, one is alliterative, and, beginning with, 'What next?' concludes with, 'And this in latter day London.'"

They had left the picture gallery now; and, as lunch-time at The Elms was drawing near, Will and Trottie walked slowly through the Park towards Teddington. When they came to the end of the lane by which one reaches the side garden-gate of The Elms, Will paused.

"I don't think I'll come any farther, Trottie dear," he said. "It was awfully good of you to let me see you; and I shall go back to Fleet Street like a giant refreshed, after this delightful morning."

"You must n't thank me; I have enjoyed it immensely," said Trottie. "And, Will, you have interested me very much, and I feel I know a lot more of your life now; only — this is all the surface of it. What is the under-current like?"

Will's range of vision contracted sharply to the point of a small black twig in the hedge beside him. "The under-current is mostly of hard knocks just now, Trottie."

"And all your own aims and desires, Will, as you

told them me in the Fairie, — don't you care to show me that part, Will?"

"Don't ask me to now, Trottie. Everything is in the transition stage; and I — I am fighting it out as best I can." Then his voice grew stronger. "But never fear, Trottie, it will all come right. I will give the world what I want to give it, some day; but I'd rather not show you all the jumble now. But I must let you go, Trottie. I am afraid I have made you late for lunch as it is, though I meant to be very careful about that. You will forgive me for that, will you not? And be happy in the Riviera — Good-bye, Trottie!"

"Good-bye!" said Trottie, as Will held her hand in his. "And — I'm glad you made me late for lunch, Will dear."

Will stood watching at the end of the lane, till Trottie had disappeared through the little wicket-gate which led onto the lawn of The Elms.

CHAPTER XXI

SUGGESTION

"But, Miss Lipston, you said, only a minute ago, you were longing for a cup of tea."

"True, my dear, but I did not say that I was longing to invade a bachelor's establishment, and demand tea from the head of the house. Besides, I should think it most likely that your cousin Robert would be not at home, at all events to ladies."

"Then we should be entertained by the secretary from the South Pole, and that would be delightful. Oh, do say yes! Let me tell the coachman."

"My dear Charlotte!"

"James, drive to Mr. Robert's, please. There now, you dear; I have told him, and you would not countermand my order, you know you would n't, because it means a cup of tea."

Miss Lipston folded her neatly gloved hands with a fold that expressed the resignation of a feminine Cranmer at the stake; and the brougham started for the chambers off Pall Mall.

Trottie and Miss Lipston had finished another and a final afternoon's shopping, and on the following day

were to leave London with James Cumming for the Riviera. In the mean time Trottie had gained her point, and if tea could be obtained under the auspices of the excellent Barlow, she had made up her mind that Miss Lipston should enjoy it in Robert's chambers.

Arrived at the big old house where Robert lived, within a stone's throw of the main thoroughfare of London's club-land, Trottie and her companion were received by the impassive Barlow in the same demurely respectful manner in which that model servant received his master's ordinary and masculine callers. Silently this study in black-and-white glided down the corridor in front of the two ladies, to show them into Robert Darley's reception-room. Had he been of a somewhat higher grade in the social scale, Miss Lipston would have fallen in love with this man, from sheer admiration of his gliding movements.

In answer to Trottie's enquiries, Barlow said that Robert was with Mr. Crossland in the study; and as the trio passed the slightly open door of this room, Trottie heard her cousin's voice, followed by two or three words in a lower key, which she knew must have come from the secretary. On the mat at the open door lay Satan, the kangaroo dog, his splendid limbs stretched at full length, and his big eyes gazing in mild astonishment at the two representatives of a sex with which he was but little acquainted. Trottie stooped to stroke the animal, and then, acting on an impulse the wisdom of which she did not stop to consider, she pushed the door and stepped into Robert's

study, whilst Miss Lipston, in all good faith, followed Barlow into the reception-room.

As she entered the room, Robert looked up from where he sat, in an arm-chair near the window, with an expression on his face which Trottie had never before seen there. His hair was ruffled as though his fingers had frequently been passed through it in nervousness. His forehead was knit and creased, and his whole face told of the strain of mental effort. In the chair before the table, with his back half turned to where she stood, and a heap of papers beside him on the floor, Trottie saw a man whose thin face was browned with the tan that comes after many successive summers in the South, and whose grey hair would have been wavy if a little less closely cropped. Seen in profile, as Trottie saw the secretary's face, it impressed her as being the most striking embodiment of rugged, unassuming strength, in a man of subordinate position, that she had ever seen.

"Good gracious, Trottie!" said Robert. "How did you come here? Where's Barlow? I mean, how are you, little girl, and I am delighted to see you; only — you should n't burst unawares with your sunshine into a man's working den. Trottie, this is Mr. Crossland, of whom you have heard me speak. Crossland, my cousin, Miss Cumming."

The man from Australia had risen at the moment of Robert's first exclamation on seeing Trottie; and now he bowed to the pretty, blushing girl with a grace which twenty years' drifting about the world's beaches

had not taken from him. It was rather an odd picture that these three formed in Robert Darley's study. Newspapers and documents were scattered about the floor. Both men were in a somewhat ruffled, dishevelled state; and the place was full of the tenseness of hard work. And in the midst of this stood Trottie, like a wood violet dropped on the pavement of a crowded city street. In point of richness, her gown might well have been worn by the lady type-writer who sometimes visited that study; but there was an indefinable daintiness about its clinging folds which the type-writer might have envied, but could not have imitated. Then, too, Trottie always carried about with her a subtle atmosphere which was part of her own innocent self, — her charm, that something which, whilst unmistakeable, is yet impalpable and indescribable, — an atmosphere which brought fleeting visions to one's senses, of sunbeams dancing across rippling water, of flowers, dew-laden, nodding their heads among long blades of fresh grass, and of perfect faces seen under masses of dark billowy hair, painted on backgrounds of pale gold.

Such was Trottie as she stood in Robert Darley's study, whilst Miss Lipston sank back in a chair in the reception-room, and Barlow, in the corridor, allowed his thin eye-brows to rise imperceptibly almost at the disappearance of Miss Cumming.

"I came with Miss Lipston to see if you would give us some tea, Robert," said Trottie, raising her brown eyes after returning the secretary's bow.

"Miss Lipston is in the next room, and I — I know it was very rude; but the dog was such a beauty, and I heard your voice, so I came in. And, Robert, you never showed me this room before." Trottie turned towards the heap of interesting odds and ends which littered a long table on one side of the fire. Robert smiled.

"No. There are, I confess, one or two things of mine which I have not yet shown even to you. But, Trottie, if you will join Miss Lipston in the next room, I 'll tell Barlow to send tea up; and in about ten minutes, if you will excuse me till then, I 'll be with you. There 's something I am very busy about with Mr. Crossland; but it will not keep me long now."

"Oh, Robert!" said Trottie, with a look that would have softened a Pathan. "Do let me stay here. Miss Lipston is dying for tea, and I don't want any. Let me sit here and look at these things. I will be as quiet as a mouse, and I am not a political spy, you know."

Robert was annoyed that his pretty cousin should have come upon him at all in that room, and made a rapid mental note of a cutting rebuke to be administered to the perfect Barlow. Had he been in his usually easy and collected frame of mind, he would simply have dismissed the subject of discussion with Crossland, and have humoured Trottie to the top of her bent. Now, however, he was too wrapped up in his conversation with the secretary to put aside the

matter of it. But he yielded to Trottie's entreaties as any man less obdurate than an advertisement canvasser must have yielded; and, with a look that told of trouble to come, Barlow was ordered to take tea to Miss Lipston, and to tell that lady that Miss Cumming was with her cousin. Meanwhile, Trottie seated herself beside the table near the fire, and, with assurances that he would be free in a few minutes, Robert retired with his secretary to the other end of the big room.

As Trottie sat with one little gloved hand resting on Satan's head — the animal had promptly made friends with Robert's fair guest, and sat on the rug beside her, his long muzzle resting on her lap, and his great eyes looking wonderingly up at her face — she asked herself, in genuine surprise, why she had entreated Robert to allow her to remain in his study. True, the innumerable little relics of Southern European travel which lay scattered about the long table were interesting, but she knew that her desire to look at them had not influenced her wish to remain in the room. It was not until long after she had left the house that the girl realised that the motive which had actuated her pleadings was a desire to hear the talk of the strong man, whose nervous face and deep-set eyes had suggested to her latent reserves of force and capabilities of action, new to her young mind. She had seen Robert's secretary, and wanted to hear him. The slight inflection of superiority, assertion of right to command, which had struck her in Robert's voice as he spoke to

the older man, and the quiet subordinate deference with which this was received by one whose nature, to Trottie, seemed infinitely the stronger of the two; this had served only to excite still further her curiosity and interest in the men seen together.

When Robert first resumed his seat by the window, his mind was still partially under the influence of the impression produced by Trottie's presence, and what he said to his secretary meant merely the formal picking up of threads suddenly dropped. They were talking of a debate expected to take place in the House on the following evening, in connection with a bill introduced by Robert's chief, and in support of which Robert was to speak. He had dealt with the matter, in a prospective *ex-parte* manner, at a political gathering of the previous evening, and his secretary had attended with a short-hand writer to report the speech Robert made then. As they talked, the man from Australia referred constantly to certain thin slips of paper on which the short-hand writer's transcript of the speech was written; and Trottie could see that the object of the discussion was to draw from this preliminary speech, material for Robert's part in the debate in the House; to eliminate its weaknesses, and to bring out its strong features.

"Your idea of winding up with the argument about the effect of the bill on the view taken by other powers of our naval standing, is very good, Crossland," said Robert, picking up a sheet of the transcript. "But one must have the sympathy of the House in

putting a point at the end of a speech. You know what the papers said about the Bayswater address. After that point, I must go into detail a little and explain the motive, or the end I claim itself will seem nothing. They would n't trace effect from cause, I 'm certain of it, Crossland."

"If I might suggest," said the owner of the kangaroo dog, quietly, "I would say that explanatory detail is generally the weakness of everything spoken. The points in the Bayswater speech which carried the crowd with you to a man, were the points in which you insisted, the points where you assumed, laid down your view in the strength of its simplicity, taking as obvious and for granted the desirability of its end. My advice is to conclude with the patriotic appeal, and I think any explanation of motive afterwards would distinctly weaken the effect of the speech. However, if—"

"Just read me that argument in the rough, as it is there, Crossland. It is only three slips."

Then Trottie, playing absently with some little bronze figures of Arabs on horseback, heard the secretary's deep, strong tones, as he read over an extract, which she did not in the least understand, from Robert's speech of the previous night. All Trottie knew was, that the words seemed wonderfully in keeping with everything about the man who read them; that they made her catch her breath and clench her hand on the black dog's head; and that at their conclusion a little shiver ran through her, as though, hav-

ing just tided over some crisis, she was returning safe to her ordinary life.

"Then," said Crossland, laying down the slips in his hand, "here you go on to say, 'It will be clear to you, gentlemen, that this being attained, a certain —'"

"That is enough," said Robert, peremptorily raising one hand. "Cut it out. Anything after that on the same subject would be a mistake."

Trottie noticed that in some way Robert seemed to be checking and correcting an impression held by the secretary, rather than accepting a suggestion of his.

"At that point," said Crossland, "the Bayswater people leaned back in their chairs and simply rested and took breath during your explanation. It will have greater effect, I think, if in the House, Mr. Darley, your hearers should not be allowed to take breath. Your speech, as you will remember you decided, is, like most strong things, to be brief."

By this time it was evident to Trottie, sitting at the long table, that Robert, at all events, if not both the men, had forgotten her presence. As their talk went on, the younger man rose once or twice from his chair. He would take two or three hasty steps behind the writing-table, and then, returning to his seat, would sink into it, with what seemed to the girl, in her shadowy corner at the other end of the room, almost a sigh of exhaustion.

Several times the secretary read brief extracts from the slips which lay at his elbow on the table; and to

the inexperienced girl, who of course did not comprehend the matter in hand, it seemed that Robert, after raising objections to deferentially put suggestions, invariably accepted them when shown in the light of his secretary's extracts, and in accepting, insisted on them, as though they were ideas of his opposed by the man Crossland.

When the light from the big window had grown so dim that all the end of the room in which Trottie sat was wrapped in dark shadow, Robert was lying back in his low chair, his head on a level with the window-sill, and the hazy light falling across it, showing to Trottie a face flushed and twitching with excitement, and a forehead so moist that the ruffled hair lying upon it had become wet and lank. Yet his eyes seemed half closed, as though either in utter indifference or great weariness.

He had not spoken for a minute or so, but before that he had almost rudely rejected one of his secretary's suggestions. Crossland was talking, and Trottie thought that his face, too, must be flushed and hot, because his voice thrilled her so, and there was more force and strength in his words than when they had made her catch her breath before.

He seemed to be approaching a climax in his argument, and his voice, though not increasing in volume, was so full of concentrated strength that the words he spoke appeared to be hurled from him, as though the man's very soul was in what he said. Then in that grey light which was almost darkness, Trottie saw the

secretary's tall figure rise from the chair before the writing-table. His square shoulders seemed so much space cut out of the dim light, they looked so dark and sharply defined. He was quoting from a passage which he suggested should form the climax of Robert's speech on the following evening. His right hand was stretched out towards where Robert sat drinking in the hot words thrown toward him.

"And if England and we who be English — "

Trottie always remembered those few words, and the feeling they gave her that in another moment she should scream if the tension were not relaxed. But it was relaxed, for at the last of the eight words Robert sprang to his feet, with a nervous exclamation which was almost a cry of pain, and Crossland, lowering his outstretched hand, wheeled sharply round facing the door.

Then Barlow entered, carrying in one hand a lamp, and in the other a long taper. He had knocked, and Robert's startled exclamation on hearing that knock, he had taken for permission to come into the room.

"Miss Lipston sends her compliments, sir, and wishes to remind you that she has to reach The Elms with Miss Cumming in time for dinner this evening."

Trottie rose from her shadowy corner as Robert and his secretary stepped into the middle of the room. Robert's apologies were profuse, if somewhat disjointed. But Trottie's recollection of her leave-taking with

Middle Greyness

Crossland, Robert's escort down the corridor, and Miss Lipston's lecture in the brougham, was always a misty picture which showed clearly only the tall figure of the secretary, with arm outstretched, as he stood at the beginning of that interrupted sentence: "And if England and we who be English —"

CHAPTER XXII

SUCCESS

JAMES CUMMING'S daughter Charlotte was not of an introspective or self-analysing turn of mind. She did not, even in dreams, reflect upon the tendencies of her nature. But before going to bed on the night of that day during which she had seduced Miss Lipston into calling at Robert Darley's chambers for tea, Trottie did somewhat curiously ask herself what the impression made upon her by the secretary "from the South Pole," amounted to. After much deliberation she came to the conclusion that, "If Mr. Crossland had been Robert, he" (Robert) "would have been perfect. And," she added, "as it is, Robert's a dear, and — so is Mr. Crossland."

Fortunately Miss Lipston was no thought-reader, or the culminating impropriety of this conclusion, after all the wickedness of the afternoon, would have been too much for her shattered nerves.

Trottie had once seen, or fancied she had once seen, a moon rainbow reflected in the miniature cascade of a garden lake in the Riviera. Next morning she had seen a real and very beautiful rainbow, in bright sunlight on fleecy cloud-banks. As she rose from her

dainty bed-side, after saying her prayers, on the night of the Pall Mall visit, it occurred to her that as the rainbow of the morning sunlight had been to the miniature rainbow reflection of the evening's hazy moonlight, so was Robert Darley, M. P., to Arthur Crossland, his private secretary. Then, calling herself a foolish, presumptuous little girl, she climbed into bed and slept sweetly for eight hours.

On the day that followed, the Cumming household started for the Riviera, Rollo Croft, Robert Darley, several friends, and Trottie's own pet groom, standing on the platform at Charing Cross, to see the last of them when they left for Paris. During the whole of their stay in beautiful Southern France, James Cumming and Trottie received news every few days of some new achievement, some fresh triumph, or some advance on the path of celebrity, of the young under-secretary, whom all the great dailies delighted now to honour with congratulatory editorials and flattering paragraphs, under the headings of "Men of To-day," or "London, Hour by Hour."

Now Trottie liked to hear of Robert's progress, just as good news from Will in Fleet Street would have been a matter of real delight to her; because, apart from her love of success in a man, it had always been a feature of her childish fancies, and lately of her sisterly tenderness, to believe that these two brother-cousins of hers would be great men. But during the sunny spring days in the Riviera, she began at length to almost dread the arrival of the mail from

England, lest, bringing news of some little achievement of Robert's, it should call forth one of those remarks from James Cumming, which, during the last few months, had frequently hurt and jarred upon his sensitive daughter.

The last thing of the kind which had happened was typical of many others. Trottie had been sitting with her father at the open window of the breakfast-room in the Riviera villa; the meal being concluded, and Miss Lipston having left the room. James Cumming had been reading aloud a letter from one of his own friends in London, enclosing a newspaper-cutting, and speaking in glowing terms of the impression produced by one of Robert's speeches at an unimportant political meeting.

"He will be the greatest man of his day in politics," said Mr. Cumming, folding up his letter with a smile of satisfaction; "and I suppose you are beginning to feel very proud of your cavalier, young woman, eh?"

"Of course we are all proud of him, Father," Trottie had said, a pained look coming into her brown eyes.

"Yes, we are all proud of him"— This with a knowing smile from the tactful father. "But we don't all pretend to a proprietary interest in him, you know."

Poor little Trottie, with a helpless feeling of desire to protect something, she knew not what, tried to treat the matter lightly.

"Oh, well, I don't suppose he will always bow to our proprietorship, Father."

"I don't suppose he will, to ours; but you, puss, you are pretty confident he will not rebel against yours."

"Father, please do not say things like that. You make me — Please don't, Father!"

And with a smile and a ponderously conceived joke on his lips, James Cumming had walked out of the room, leaving Trottie feeling strangely disturbed. She was very fond of Robert, and his successes dazzled her a little. His growing fame threw a certain glamour over the young politician, in a romantic girl's mind; but underlying all this was a feeling of distaste, not only for her father's clumsy suggestions, — their crudeness, — but for what was suggested. There was something about it all which Trottie mistily mistrusted, as being in some way unfair and disloyal.

When Rollo Croft, in the course of his lecture to Maud Venner on the "Rule Britannia Party," said that Robert Darley had "come out as an orator," he had, as such men often do, quite unconsciously struck a note of perfect truth.

Those who watched Robert's development from the stand-point of men interested in every move on the great political chess-board of Westminster, were astounded at the manner in which, from the close of the past year, the young man had jumped into fame as a public speaker. They noticed, with wondering admiration, that crowds, who six months before would not have listened to a dozen words from him, were content now to sit or stand in crowded halls, held breathless for an hour at a stretch by his impassioned

eloquence, his masterly play upon the emotions. And all this Robert knew was entirely due to his having, by the strength of his oratory, taken a certain section of the public by surprise.

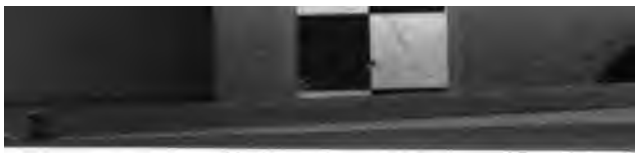
Whether these speeches of his were simply brilliant fireworks, or really political events, there was that about them which swayed the crowd from tears to laughter and from laughter back to tears. There was a subtle something in them which produced the impression — always intoxicating to a crowd — of a strong, brilliantly clever man taking his hearers into his confidence. In his eloquence, Robert never built up piles of logical contentions on either side of a question, offering then to his audience the key of its solution. He began always with the assumption that his attitude on a given point was, of course, understood and sympathised with. And from that, scorning the little by-ways in which an audience's bias is fished for, Robert dashed on from conclusion to conclusion, crisis to climax, calmly insistent, and strongly confident, giving his hearers little time to breathe and none to reflect, yet commanding serious respect always by his perfectly turned sentences, and by his contentions, sound and deliberate as their form was polished and convincing.

He, as it were, snatched the sympathy of his hearers in the masterful grasp of his opening burst of eloquence. From this point onward he made no demand for consideration, but, holding the minds and hearts of his audience in that first strong grip, carried them with him from height to height, in speeches

which were always brief; till, shunning the perilous seductiveness of the anti-climax, he dropped them in the white heat of fascination's enthusiasm, whole-souled believers in the views he gave them as great and certain truths. And this was what in comparatively a few months had made Robert Darley certainly a marked man, almost a famous one.

Many and various were the comments made upon all this, and amongst them none were so general as those which included reference to the meteor-like rapidity with which the young man had leaped into notoriety. There had undoubtedly been traces of power in the speech which followed his break-down in seconding the Address-in-Reply, and in various other public utterances of his. But these had merely shown promise of strength to come. They had merely hinted at brilliancy to be developed. And what made the suddenness of his present success more marked, was the fact that, late in the previous year, he had spoken at a political meeting only a few days before the "Bayswater triumph," as Croft called his first great speech, and had merely acquitted himself with the ordinary ability of a young member working out the routine part of his career.

Then, with no sign of gradual development, had come the brilliant eloquence, the impassioned strength, of the speech at Bayswater, which had set every newspaper-reader wondering who this new star in the political firmament might be, had practically given him the subordinate office he now held, and had made



of him a prize which his party in the House fully recognised the desirability of holding.

At this period of his life, a desire frequently came over Robert to show his claim to Trottie's heart,—the heart he had been told was already his. Something always seemed to intervene, however, to prevent any word being spoken. At this period, too, Robert's mind was rarely fixed, for any time, upon any one subject, or in any one train of thought. His life was a series of hot, nervous strains, brilliantly exciting moments of public achievement, and private intervals of Rollo Croft. Exactly what these intervals meant in his life, Robert never troubled to explain to himself; but he told Rollo Croft that without them, and the influence of this apostle of "caviarre," the strain of his other life would have been unsupportable. He knew, too, that what he mentally called his "Rollo Croftism" kept him always at a certain distance from James Cumming's daughter, and checked again and again the utterance of half-developed thoughts in connection with Trottie, when he and she drifted down the river together in the Fairie.

Meanwhile, Rollo Croft himself was unflagging in his attentions to "Darley's charming cousin." When, in the autumn, the Cumming household was transferred to the Grange, and Robert went down to Bramwood for a week's rest, and the paying of a little court to his constituents, Rollo Croft gladly accepted his friend's invitation to join the party in Hampshire. Then, protesting that the scenery of the place was a

mine of wealth to him as an artist, he remained under the roof which sheltered Trottie, long after the politician had returned to his town quarters.

Trottie could not fail to be amused and interested by the man's conversation; and his manner of laying tributes of his admiration at her feet was far too subtle, far too gracefully respectful, to allow of their being objectionable, even had she really disliked Robert's friend. And this was not the case. She admired his never-failing cleverness, was impressed by his undeniable brilliancy, and in her womanliness could not but be touched by his reverential courtesy. But that marvellous faculty which in girls is called instinct, in women is attributed to knowledge of the world, and, in reality, is the shield Nature gives true purity,— this intangible thing made Trottie distrust the dark man whose musical tones were so welcome a sound to Maud Venner, and to many others of her sex.

The man would have said that pique was impossible to him, because to him no atmosphere was desirable save that which was his own, created and breathed by him. Yet the artist felt very sore, under his exterior of indolent amusement with all things, when Trottie bade him a carelessly courteous and laughing "good-bye," on the morning during which he brought a long visit to a close, and left Bramwood for London.

Through the winter, James Cumming and his daughter saw less than ever of Robert Darley; though it was seldom that they could not hear something of his movements by reference to any newspaper. When

they did meet, early in the year, Robert came like a whirlwind upon father and daughter, for three short days, success written plainly on his face, every word he uttered redolent of an atmosphere of power and achievement. His tone to his adopted father was not now the old deferential readiness to take advice, but the attitude of one who had attained, who could give advice, who recorded his progress, and was accustomed to have court paid him in all his utterances and doings.

Trottie, glad though she was to hear all he had to tell, yet felt strangely removed from her brother-cousin, and said once, half-laughingly, half-sadly, "I am afraid you sometimes forget the panther-and-Sunday-school promise, Robert."

A shadow of pain crossed the man's face as Trottie said this; and something of the queer battling look which Rollo Croft had seen years before, when the two had stood together on the river bank listening to a band playing, came into his dark eyes. There passed before his mind at the same time, a picture of himself turning wearily away from the strong secretary in the chambers off Pall Mall, to Rollo Croft, Bèté, and the atmosphere he reached when he walked across the Park at night. And the picture sparkled through the mist which separated it from his mind. Then the half-hungry look left his eyes. Bold confidence returned to his face, and he laughed as he said: —

"No, no, little girl! I am going to make more panther promises, and — claim greater fulfilment of them, soon."

CHAPTER XXIII

INTOXICATION

BEAUTIFUL, petulant spring had disappeared with its child-like moods and wayward fancies; and two out of the three months which we in the North call summer, had followed in its train, making their sunshine and festivities things of history. The former, James Cumming and his daughter had passed in the Isle of Wight. The summer they were spending in the house above Teddington Lock. Rollo Croft was in Scarborough, and so was Bèté. London was growing weary, and Will, in Fleet Street, paused outside shops where boating flannels were exposed for sale, and dreamed of the Fairie lying moored under shady willows. Robert Darley spent each Saturday to Monday in Scarborough, and perhaps one afternoon in each week at The Elms.

In Pall Mall, windows and porticos were shaded from the hot sun by striped awnings; and, in the cool brown-fronted house where Robert lived, Satan dozed through long afternoons dreaming of wallabies and of tall gum-trees. And the secretary with his nervous face and grey hair, worked tirelessly on in the big study with the bow-window. The strong hand of this

clerical assistant, whom no one noticed and few ever saw, flew from side to side of foolscap at all hours of day and night. He wrote and thought and talked, this man from Australia, and to him rest seemed an unnecessary detail.

Late one Monday afternoon, Robert Darley arrived in London from Scarborough. While driving in a hansom from King's Cross to his chambers, he took from his pocket, amongst a batch of other letters, the note which had invited him to begin this last little trip to the North on Thursday instead of Saturday. Though he was then returning after having paid the visit, he yet read that note through and stamped his foot on the floor of the hansom when he came to the postscript. What the postscript said was: —

"Of course, *cher ami*, I make these suggestions humbly, and subject to the approval of the great secretary. If his gracious secretaryship can be induced to permit so much freedom, then please do all I have said."

There was certainly very little in it, one would have thought, to make Robert Darley stamp his foot on the floor of the hansom.

Half an hour after arriving at his town house, Robert was lying back in the low chair by the window of his study, facing the table at which his secretary sat, and glancing, with a smile of pleased triumph on his face, through a little pile of newspaper-cuttings selected by the man Crossland during the past two days.

"They are mostly flattering enough, are they not?" said the secretary, looking towards the newspaper-cuttings.

"Yes," replied Darley, and then continued reading carelessly.

The secretary's face, which had lost some of its rich tan and was thinner than when Trottie first saw it, had in it on this afternoon a very anxious, nervous look. With this, however, there was a light of determination in the black eyes, which the look of subordinate deference, now habitual to him, did not hide.

"You notice," he said, quietly, "that the 'Morning Herald' assumes as certain that you will be looked to to secure the third reading of the Discretionary Limit Supply Bill?"

Robert nodded. "It will require a good deal of securing, and certainly ought to have been shelved till next session."

"It might have been better," said the secretary, quickly; "but it affords a splendid opportunity for you to do the party a big service before the session closes. It is only a fortnight now, and if you finish on an achievement like that, we may expect almost anything when Parliament meets again. And then, too, you would begin the slack season with a triumph."

A flash of enthusiasm passed over Robert's face; but he replied almost with indifference, "Yes, it will be a good finish, and — I daresay I shall manage it. Have you heard anything from C——?"

"No. He evidently looks to you now to take all initial steps, and does not even claim to lead." The secretary paused for a few moments, toying with the quill-pen in his hand. Then he suddenly dropped the pen, and, looking up at his employer, said,—

"After all that has passed between us, you will pardon my venturing on such a comment; but I really do not think you attach sufficient importance to this matter, Mr. Darley. You know the half-defined position you occupy in the eyes of the Defence Party. It is just possible the Government may be defeated next week, and in any case the session ends in a fortnight. I am sure you recognise fully what the last year has meant in your career, and to my mind the question of its result lies to a great extent in the events of the coming two weeks."

Robert's eyebrows were raised, and a look of annoyance, the annoyance of a successful man who will not brook interference, was on his face, as he said, shortly, "Well?"

The secretary winced under the intolerant tone of the expression. Something flashed into his eyes which was very like anger; but he said, deferentially enough:

"I trust, Mr. Darley, that our relations since I entered your service have been such as to exonerate me from a suspicion of presumption or interference." The strong fingers gripped again the quill-pen on the table. "I do not forget that I am merely your secretary; but — the fact is, I am very anxious about the two weeks that are to end this session."

"You need not be so, Crossland. It is not my way to fail."

"That, I, who read every word of your speeches, fully recognise." There was a faint inflection of something unusual in the secretary's tone, and Robert moved uneasily in his chair and frowned.

"I fully recognise it. But in this country, a young man may not rest on his oars, nor even on his laurels. You will not misunderstand me? I may say plainly what is in my mind?"

"Say on, by all means," said Robert, plunging both hands into his pockets. "But I have an appointment at the club for eight o'clock, and I want to speak to you on another matter before I go."

"All I want to say," resumed the secretary, "is that, feeling certain, as I do, that a very great deal hangs on the next fortnight, I am very anxious that your energies should be confined to steering through it. A break afterwards will be easy."

"I am glad of your advice on many points, Crossland. It is for that, that I — it is in this way that your services have been of value to me; but the matter of what I shall be energetic in, and what I shall not, is a little outside your province, you know." Robert's voice was an assertion of the gulf between master and man.

"I am speaking and thinking simply as an adviser in your political work, Mr. Darley; and I am convinced of the permanent importance of success in these two weeks that are coming. Nothing else would induce me to make any suggestions such as

these. But with these in my mind I go so far as to ask you to confine your energy — your — to give the whole of your brilliancy to the matter in hand."

"You flatter me, Crossland; but you ought to know that for years past my life has been devoted to my political work."

"Pardon me, sir, if I say that I would ask more than all that now."

"You certainly ask a good deal, Crossland."

The secretary rose from his chair and stood before his employer in the warm evening sunlight which shone through the bay-window.

"I do ask a good deal, and I ask it believing that it will be given, and seeing, if you will allow me to say so, more clearly than you do, the crucial importance of it now. I have not lived here and worked for you, I have not watched every move and studied every word which affected your career, without seeing which moments were your strongest, and which — were your weakest. I have seen clearly enough the talent, the brilliancy, and the strength which meant success; and I have caught uneasily whiffs of the atmosphere which was the breath of tendencies in an opposite direction. If Mr. Rollo Croft — "

Robert drew his hands from his pockets and clenched them on his knees. "I must absolutely decline to hear comments on my friends, Crossland," he said. The secretary appeared to have hardly noticed the interruption, though he inclined his head slightly, as though in submission.

"If during the next fortnight you could simply do without your friend, Mr. Croft, and his distracting atmosphere, if you would let this room see all your strength, if you would expend no brilliancy in Kensington, and give me your whole mind till the session is over, its end could be made to bring splendid success — assured power."

Darley rose from his chair with a look of that intolerance which is almost insolence on his handsome face. "The tone you adopt, Crossland, is absurd; and I wish you to understand clearly that I look for no assistance or advice from you in matters of this kind. I have noticed your tendency in this way for some little time and in several ways, and it is distinctly objectionable."

Again into the secretary's black eyes came that angry snap which resembled, faintly, the glitter which may be seen in the eyes of a wild beast, when the tamer, posing before his audience, cuts the animal sharply across its face with the thong of his whip. But this was a passing look, and that to which it gave place was almost tender, — the strong, simple dignity one may see in the eyes of a lady's thorough-bred horse, when its mistress bends in her saddle to stroke the arched neck as a yelping cur snaps at the animal's feet.

"Believe me, Mr. Darley, believe me, though what I say may sound presumptuous, it is said in all deference. Outsiders see most of the game. I know your power, and I know that every particle of it is

necessary for success in the next two weeks. I know that during this summer the intervals in which your mind and its strength have been removed from this study, have been longer and more frequent than before. I know that the periods during which you have been in contact with me, and your whole self has been concentrated on the work of the career in which I am privileged to advise, have been shorter and more intermittent. And I say it with regret, but most emphatically, that if Mr. Rollo Croft and his atmosphere share as much of you in the fortnight which is to come, as in that which has just ended, then nothing I can do will bring the success which might be drawn from the end of this session."

The secretary had not raised his voice, but there was infinitely more force and feeling in it than before.

"I really should advise a little deliberation, Crossland, before you continue in that strain." Robert spoke almost contemptuously. "I have been always ready to give due weight — full weight — to your suggestions; but your present tone would imply that my success, ultimately and in the next two weeks, depended in some way upon you. This is obviously —"

"Absurd," broke in the secretary, stung for once into an interruption. "I have no desire to imply it, and it is because I know that it depends entirely on yourself that I would beg you to give yourself to it. If I say give to me, I mean to that which — with the mechanical part of which — I have something to do. Mr. Croft and myself, in the fortnight which

is to come, stand on opposite sides of you. The sides are success and failure."

"With regard to Mr. Croft, I absolutely forbid farther reference of this kind," said Darley, hotly. "And regarding the rest of the question, I can only assume that you are somewhat carried away by your enthusiasm. So far, as for the moment to — to forget the nature of the position you occupy."

The younger man seemed to be deliberately working himself into a passion, so fiercely did the changing expressions come and go in his face. There was intoxication in his eyes, and insolence in the look of conscious and tasted success which his face wore. For three or four days he had been breathing that other atmosphere which the secretary referred to, and now there was little or no response in his squared shoulders and back-thrown head, to the influence with which on certain previous occasions the older man had saturated him.

"I beg you —" began Crossland.

Darley's clenched hand came down with a thud on the cabinet which stood at one end of the writing-table.

"I will not hear another word of it. Your suggestions are insolent, and the atmosphere I live in is a matter you have nothing to do with. I shall continue to live in it, and wish to hear no comments upon it from you. You are an excellent secretary, and as such I pay you your salary. In connection with political detail, I am glad to hear your advice; but your

apparent notion that your presence actually affects my success in public life, or that your opinions should influence my private life, is preposterous. My position in politics is something which was half achieved before I saw you, and would be carried on to success if I never saw you again. Failure is something foreign to me. My attitude in social life is something in which interference from you is presumption that I will not tolerate for an instant."

The secretary had sunk into his chair, and sat with head bent while Robert spoke. As his employer ceased speaking, he raised his head and showed a face white with suppressed emotion, and in which weariness was the dominant expression.

"My whole intention has been misunderstood," he said, speaking in the tired voice of a patient teacher weary of teaching; "and you credit me with motives which our relative attitudes in other matters would, I thought, have prevented occurring to you. I—"

"Those relations are something you vastly overrate, sir."

"They may be. One is apt to overrate that in which one's whole mind is occupied. My assurances of deference and respect do not appear to influence your consideration of what I have to say, Mr. Darley."

"When what you have to say shows want of respect and absence of deference — no!"

"Sir, I am an older man than you," — the secre-

tary raised one hand, as though imploring consideration,— "and I have put my whole soul into your work, doing my small best to make its end success. Other influences, very clear and distinct to me, — believe me I have reason to know their weight, — have worked upon you, are working upon you, against the end of my efforts. A time comes when I see great attainment within your reach; and I, knowing that the influences on one side will rob you of it, and on the other will give it — I speak plainly to you of both, and implore you to forego one."

"You weary me," said Robert, impatiently. But the secretary continued, with hardly a pause: —

"Seeing it all with eyes that have seen many similar things, feeling it with a mind that has felt similar things, surely I may be pardoned if, in trying to show the danger of it to you, I touch upon matters outside the bounds of my actual duty."

At last the secretary's voice was raised, and there was power in it which seemed to make the very air vibrate. But the man he faced was intoxicated by the spirit of his conscious strength, drunk by his sips of the wine of success.

"There is an atmosphere you and I have breathed in this room, an atmosphere of effort and of strength, in which success is won."

"That atmosphere is mine, — now and always."

"That atmosphere is — yours, and breathed for the next two weeks will give success. But tainted, weakened, by all that Mr. Rollo Croft and his influ-

ences have been to you this summer, it will yield only —"

"I will not hear another word, sir!" Robert's voice was hoarse with excitement. "Your insolence is unbearable, and your presence is distasteful."

"You will hear me, sir. You will hear me, though in anger. What I have said is true, whether presumptuous or not. As to its presumption — here! I am your slave. Hear me now, and do as I ask for this little time, and I will be always a slave to you. I who have looked at nothing else since I first entered this room, I see so clearly now how this end can be grasped in a few days, how it will be lost if you will not shut out that other atmosphere. I implore you, Mr. Darley —"

"For Heaven's sake, man, cease your melodrama, and leave the subject, or the room, — or both."

The secretary's hand gripped the back of the chair by the writing-table. "Can nothing make him see it," he muttered between his teeth. Then, raising his voice, he said: —

"I ask you, sir, not as secretary to employer, but as man to man, to remember the day before the Bayswater speech. I ask you to remember the evening before the naval debate; to think of other periods at which I have — in which we have worked together, and then to hear me when I say that if you will do as I ask for these two weeks, you can achieve great success. That if you will not, I — that end cannot be brought about — will not come. That if you

will close your doors to Mr. Croft for a fortnight, I — yes, I, your secretary, can make you grasp big things. That if you will not do this thing, I cannot by — "

"Then, damn you, don't, and leave my room, and the house! Here, wait a minute!"

His hands trembling with excitement, and his lips quivering with anger, Robert Darley snatched his cheque-book from where it lay in a pigeon-hole of the open cabinet. Tearing out a cheque form without touching the butt portion, he filled it in for half the amount of his secretary's yearly salary, and hurriedly signing it, sprang to his feet again.

"Here!" he almost shouted, as, extending his hand, he thrust the flimsy sheet of paper before Crossland. "Here 's six months' salary in lieu of notice; and the sooner you are out of the house for good and all, the better pleased I shall be."

As the man from Australia did not raise his hand, the paper dropped and fluttered down to the floor.

"Do you mean this?"

"Mean it, man? Yes. Do you think I cannot live without you? Go, and go as quickly as you can!"

So, without a word, the man who went by the name of Crossland turned on his heel and walked out of his son's room.

In the corridor lay Satan, whining uneasily as he listened to the raised voices in the study. As his master stepped into the passage, Satan bounded

towards him, and licked the hot hand hanging by his side. Crossland reached for his hat from where it hung on the hat-rack.

"Come on, good dog! Let us get out into the moonlight — and breathe."

So, together, the two walked out into the quiet street turning off Pall Mall.

CHAPTER XXIV

A STUMBLE

LEFT alone in his study, Robert Darley paced to and fro on the rug before the empty fire-place, muttering angrily to himself at intervals, and perspiring at every pore. The evening was a close one, even for August.

Once whilst the politician walked backward and forward on the rug, Barlow tapped gently at the study door, and asked his master if he should bring lights. Robert answered in the negative, with an expletive which jarred rudely on Barlow's refined susceptibilities, and then resumed his walk. When every trace of light had faded out of the western sky, Robert sat down in the chair by the big window, and rested his hot head between both hands, his elbows on his knees.

It was after eleven when, springing to his feet, he rang for Barlow and asked, "Why the devil" no lights had been brought into the room. Then, perhaps, remembering that he had made an appointment at the club for eight o'clock that evening, he dressed hurriedly, and walking into the street hailed a hansom in Pall Mall. When the hansom stopped outside the club which Robert had mentioned in his

direction to its driver, he raised the trap over his head, and said, "I 've altered my mind, Cabby. Drive to The Odalisque, at the end of L—— Gardens, West Kensington."

By next morning Darley had quite recovered his usual easy confidence, and said to Barlow, "I am afraid I was a little abrupt to you last night, Barlow — not quite myself, eh? I was rather upset by a little difficulty with my secretary. By the way, be sure all his things are sent out of the house to-day. Mr. Crossland has left my service."

The impassive Barlow bowed, pleased inwardly that the reign of the man from Australia was over; for, although he had conceived a very great respect for the secretary, yet he had been unable to make friends with that gentleman's dog. And then, too, there were certain disadvantages in having two masters. In this way was the event judged of by Barlow, and to be sure he had some authority for his idea regarding the serving of two masters.

Robert, now that his secretary had really gone, seemed to drink more freely of the wine of success. At all events the effects of the intoxicant, which to some men is only a gentle stimulant, were more visible in the expression of his face, and the assured confidence with which he spoke. He surprised two or three intimate friends at the club by saying that he was on the lookout for a new secretary. "A man who knows his position and can mind his own business, you know. My man grew so fond of my affairs that I had

to let him go, though in his own place he was a jewel among secretaries."

A couple of days after his dismissal of the man Crossland, Robert went down to The Elms, carrying with him all his rushing air of brilliancy and triumph. He listened to James Cumming's expressions of regret with reference to the enforced loss of the secretary's services; and then, having casually hinted at his intention to end his parliamentary labours for that session with a certain grand *coup*, he went out into the garden to look for Trottie.

James Cumming had never thought seriously or otherwise of his adopted son's relations with the secretary, and was only a little more impressed by the news of this man's dismissal than he would have been by the loss of a coachman or a groom. But, apart from this, he could not prevent an occasional twinge of nervousness coming over him when he heard of fresh advances in Robert's career. The possibilities were so great. And now this hint of a grand effort before the end of the session made him ask himself, half-jokingly, if it were really possible for this adopted son of his to fail in anything, and if so, what the result of failure would be. The experiences of the past few years, however, were all against the possibility suggested; and so the millionaire smiled complacently as, looking through the open French window of his room, he saw Robert's tall figure approaching Trottie on the green ridge where the lawn began to slope towards the river.

A Stumble

"Good afternoon, Trottie," said Robert, brightly, as they met on the grass. "With the panther-and-Sunday-school promise strongly uppermost in my mind, I have come to see if you will take me on the river, and brush the end-of-the-session cobwebs out of my head with your sunshine. Will you?"

Trottie readily assented; and together they walked towards the boat-house, outside the entrance to which lay the Fairie, moored where Trottie and Miss Lipston had left it in the morning. They had a very pleasant afternoon on the river, and the young politician enjoyed to the full this little break in his busy life.

He began badly by telling Trottie of his dismissal of the man Crossland, and speaking of it in a bantering way as "the decline and fall of the perfect secretary."

"But, oh, Robert, surely it is a great pity?" said the girl, impulsively.

"Yes, certainly it is a pity, because he was undoubtedly a good man in his place. But like most good servants he had his one failing. He took too much upon himself, and wanted to dictate to me in a manner altogether absurd. So I had to let him go, and am now more or less forlorn and secretaryless."

Robert smiled. And Trottie recalled vaguely that tone of his voice in speaking to the grey-haired secretary, which had somehow jarred upon her, on the afternoon when she had sat at the long table in her cousin's study, — the tone which had seemed to her a sort of reminder to the stronger man that the weaker man was master. The fact of Trottie's recalling this

made Robert's conversational opening unfortunate for himself.

Then he began to talk of his intended last effort in a successful session. And there he chose his subject wisely, for, as he went on to describe the details of procedure to Trottie, he waxed enthusiastic himself, and threw all the weight of superficial brilliancy into what he said. Eloquently he dwelt on the difficulties which the measure he was to support had encountered in its inception. Richly he coloured the dangers which its defeat would entail; and with much spirit he told of the gain to his party, and the triumph to himself, which would come with its success. Here he showed himself in his most favourable light to Trottie, who followed his every word with eager sympathy. In the telling of this, he stood before the girl as a man who had succeeded, who had won celebrity and was on the eve of winning fame. The notes that jarred were silent. The sides of his nature which suggested unfavourable comparisons were hidden; and all that was shown was the confident strength, the alert grasp of power, which dazzled Trottie and made her sweet face flush with sympathetic enthusiasm.

During dinner at The Elms that evening, Robert was in higher spirits than ever. His conversation glittered with plausible witticism; and James Cumming, carried away by the exhilaration of an atmosphere which had intoxicated his adopted son, paid Robert extravagant compliments, and enthusiastically proposed as a toast the health of England's future prime minister.

A Stumble

Then, when coffee had been served in the drawing-room, and, after a little music, James Cumming had retired to smoke a cigar in his study; Trottie, her eyes shining with enthusiasm, and her cheeks flushed by the air of tension which Robert brought with him, strolled on to the verandah at the back of the house, and stood with her cousin looking out into the moonlight.

"It is very beautiful," said Trottie, with a little sigh which the tender moonlight forced from her.

"It is beautiful," agreed Robert. "Do you know, Trottie, nights like these carry me right away back to the Oxford vacation days, and even to the Rugby holiday time, when we used to picnic all day on the river, and then idle about here in the evening till old Mary came to carry you off to bed. You were a very little girl then, Trottie; and we had nothing in the world to worry us, unless it were the fear that next day might be wet, and so the fun be spoiled."

Robert's voice was strong and clear — too strong for those associations and the tender surroundings — and ringing with the bold confidence Trottie had seen in his face and heard in his tones all the afternoon. Out there in the moonlight, it did not strike very pleasantly on her ears.

"But you would not have those days back again," she said, more questioningly than as an assertion.

"No, no! No, I would not have them back, with all their doubts and uncertainties, — the hopes of winning mixed with fears of losing. No, Trottie, when

one wins success, one does not want to go back. Power even half won is too great a prize to exchange for the charm of irresponsibility. Besides, a boy's joys would be very insipid — are insipid, don't you think so? — when compared with the pleasures of achieving, the delight of triumph. I sometimes feel as though I could not have lived without success; as though failure were a far more miserable thing than death. What do you think, Trottie?"

Trottie was gazing dreamily up into the blue, moonlit sky.

"I heard some one say once, that success, as the word was understood, did not matter much so long as one lived all that was good and worth living in one's self, and did the things it was in one to do. I don't know — I am only a girl, and — I think if I were a man I should like to succeed, and to do all that was in me, too — as well; but — I don't know."

"You are right, though, Trottie. If you were a man I'm certain you would want to succeed. A man ought to succeed; and, oh, it is itself a beautiful thing!"

Robert, in the quick, nervous way in which his mind always worked now, was thinking of his own life, from the time he left Oxford, on through all the series of triumphs which had placed him in the position he now occupied as perhaps the best-known man in the younger school of politicians of his day. And he thought, too, of the evening only a few days ago, when that grey-haired secretary had spoken of the possibility of failure, and he, Robert, had dismissed him.

A Stumble

He shook his shoulders with a shivering movement which made Trottie ask if he were cold. And, the uncomfortable feeling, passing from him suddenly as it had come, his face resumed its assured look, and he turned towards the girl at his side.

Yes, he thought, the beginning of his life had been brilliant. And now it was no longer a question of hope and fear. He had won and grasped power, and had failed in nothing. The air round him began to grow faint and heavy with dreamy tenderness. A little shiver ran through Trottie, and she looked round nervously, though no word had been spoken.

And this beautiful girl standing beside him, pure and dainty in her fluttering muslins, she, too, was his for the asking. Her own father had said so. She was one of his triumphs, — a crown to the glowing series of successes in the year that had passed.

"Trottie!" His voice was just a little softer now, though strong and confident as ever.

"Yes, Robert."

"People say I have won success. They say I have achieved far more than a young man may hope for. They say I have failed in nothing. Do you think so?"

"Of course you have succeeded wonderfully, Robert. It is splendid; and — I suppose you have failed in nothing." Trottie stopped abruptly.

"And you like success, Trottie?" Then, waiting for no answer to his questioning statement, Robert touched Trottie's little hand with his own strong

fingers, making her arm to quiver as he did so; and, speaking quickly, he said: —

"Supposing I were to take all this success, all this power and what it has given me, and lay it all at your feet, and my heart, too, Trottie, and say, Will you be my wife? What should you answer to that, Trottie?"

Robert's hot fingers closed on his cousin's hand as he spoke; and all that was dramatic in the man — and that was much — made the moment a thrilling one. It was not that he thought the girl's answer a matter of great importance. That was too assured. But yet it would be sweet to hear her tender, faltering acceptance. He did not see the girl's face turn white as damask in the moonlight; neither did he notice that the tender eyes filled with tears of pure sympathy. He did not see this, because he was looking abstractedly at the little brown hand which struggled to escape his fingers. Pretty maiden modesty, he thought it, as he stood dreamily drinking in the atmosphere of the situation.

"There, Trottie, dear. Don't think I am trying to force you to put it into words. One understands some things without words. But it is all true, Trottie. I have thought of you all along, dear; and now it is yours, all this that I have won; and — I love you, Trottie, and you shall be my wife — my beautiful wife, and I will win more for you; and —"

"Oh, Robert, Robert, please don't say it! Can't you see?"

A Stumble

Robert raised his eyes from the little hand that had at length escaped his fingers, and, looking into Trottie's face, he saw big, glistening tears rolling down her white cheeks in the moonlight, from eyes which half an hour before, in the midst of his talk of his own success, had sparkled with admiring enthusiasm.

"Why — Trottie! Trottie, what's the matter, dear? What has frightened you? You know I love you. You —"

"But, Robert, — can't you see?" A little sob broke from Trottie. "I do not love you. I cannot love you. I never thought of this; and what you say could not be, because — Oh, I am so sorry, Robert; but I could n't prevent it. I cannot love you."

"But, Trottie, it's all a mistake. I've spoken too hurriedly. There, little girl; there, don't cry, I know you don't mean what you say."

Trottie touched Robert's hand with her little fingers.

"Please, Robert, don't talk like that. Indeed I mean every word. I am very, very sorry; but I can never love you — like that."

"You can never love me? You will not — not be my wife, Trottie?"

Trottie shook her head sadly; and Robert looked at her in surprised, almost dazed, wonder. This man had never failed.

"Then I've made a mistake, Trottie. Every-

body has made a mistake; and — I — Let me take you indoors, Trottie."

So Robert Darley, breathing as an alien, uneasily, the air of failure, walked into the house after his cousin, through the open windows of the drawing-room.

CHAPTER XXV

THE BLACK STREAK

ROBERT DARLEY did not take kindly to anything like defeat, and winced painfully under his first failure.

There are men — one meets them in the most Bohemian *cafés* of various Continental centres, and wonders where they hide themselves in the day-time — who live only between eleven o'clock at night and five o'clock in the morning. Then they live in an atmosphere of sparkling wines, dazzling lights, and bright music. Towards daybreak the effervescence of these men begins to subside, and their faces to look garish. Then it is their habit to drink strong black coffee. The coffee nips the effervescence suddenly; and the men face actualities, instead of possibilities. Then they call for their bills.

When Robert Darley arrived at his chambers off Pall Mall, shortly before twelve o'clock on the night of his talk in the moonlight with Trottie, he felt as these men feel just before they call for the black coffee.

Had Crossland appeared just then, and asked to be taken back into his employer's favour, it is probable that his request would have been acceded to. But the man from Australia was nowhere near Pall Mall

at the time, and so Robert walked slowly upstairs to his bedroom.

He had not the faintest idea of any attempt to alter his cousin's decision. That she should have declined the offer of his brilliancy was wherein lay the sting of this first little whiff of failure. And, besides, the look in Trottie's face, and the touch of her hand, made any such idea quite impossible.

When the next morning came, it was to James Cumming's adopted son what eleven o'clock at night is to the men who live from eleven to five or six. He had not forgotten the events of the night before, and the coming of that moment of failure on the verandah of The Elms, was a vivid reality in his mind which hardened his voice, and made the brightness of his eyes metallic. But it gave rather a desire for stimulant, than a longing for nepenthe; and the stimulant to which Robert turned was the wine of his own success. Now, to a man of Robert Darley's temperament, this wine, though perhaps less harmful physically than the morning absinthe of the *boulevardier*, is yet more intoxicating. And Robert drank it freely.

Three days after the evening at The Elms, Robert addressed a number of the supporters of his party, at a dinner given by the members of that party. His speech was very brief and very spirited; and, two minutes after he had resumed his seat and passed a handkerchief across his wet forehead, he rose and left the room. Next morning, writing in the light of all that had happened during the past year of the young

politician's life, the papers were unanimous in pronouncing this speech of Robert's a gem of oratory.

"Mr. Darley surpassed himself," said one journal; "and his brilliant little speech at the E—— Club last night stamped his power in oratory as something which, if not genius, is very closely allied to what that too often abused word means."

Robert read the flattering tribute and smiled. His ex-secretary, sitting in the smoking-room of a Fleet Street hotel, read the same passage and laughed quietly. But as he laughed, the dog, Satan, lying at his feet, rose and whined plaintively, gazing up into its master's face the while.

Rollo Croft returned to London with Bèté, at the end of that week, and his friend spent a good deal of time with them in West Kensington.

"The amount of energy you must possess, my dear Darley," said Croft, as the two sat together over their dinner just a week after Robert's evening at The Elms; "is really appalling. I hardly knew whether to condole with, or congratulate myself on the degree of vertebracy which enabled me to come back to buried Kensington with Bèté, in answer to your invitation to witness the closing act of the season — What do you call it? — in Parliament. But you, my friend — Ah well, I suppose it is of such material that martyrs — I beg pardon! — prime ministers are made."

"What a wonderful joke life is to you, Rollo," said Robert, slowly filling his glass from the bottle of champagne at his side.

"Now, for pity's sake, don't tell me that it's anything else to you; that these strenuous exertions of yours are anything but a way of adding to the eternal humorousness of things. But there, you need not answer, old man. It was unkind of me to suggest the possibility of doubt. By the way, I read a speech of yours the other day, Robert. It was not my fault; Bêté made me read it. And really, old man, I am sorry to have to accuse you of prostituting your talents; but it was a little poem. It was old Johannisberg in the long pointy glasses we used to knock the stands off in Schönhauser; and it reminded me somehow of something — I wonder what it was — that you said, or were going to say, one evening a long time ago, when a Salvation Army captain had been unkind to me at Kingston, and — I think there was a band."

"I am glad you liked the speech," said Robert. It was the brief spirited address he had given at the E—— Club.

"Liked the speech! My dear fellow, I disliked the poem as a speech, immensely; and your giving it to those people was, I think, a cruelly barbarous thing. But your own atmosphere when you made it — Ah, that must have been caviarre."

Robert looked for an instant half dreamily at his friend, as he said, "It is my atmosphere, and will be mine in the House to-morrow night. And, supposing some one said that atmosphere would bring failure, that would be — a lie, of course, would it not?"

"Naturally," murmured the artist. Then the ex-

hilarated look came quickly back into Robert's face, and the glitter into his eyes, as he said, "Come along, Rollo, old man. Let us make a move, for to-morrow we, do not die, as far as I know, but I have to work deuced hard."

"I am glad that man from the Antarctic, that secretary of yours, has left you, Darley. You are a much better man than you were with that painfully serious quill-driver hovering about you."

Robert laughed. "Yes, I think so. You two did not cotton, did you?"

"My dear fellow! I? Cotton —"

So they walked out of the room together, laughing lightly; for this was to be one of Croft's "Burgundy nights," and Robert had allowed himself to be persuaded to spend it with the artist. When they parted outside The Odalisque, in the greyness of the hour before sunrise next morning, Robert looked very weary. His voice was clear and hard, however, unnaturally so; and, when he turned to enter Croft's cab to return to his chambers, he said: —

"Don't forget, Rollo, to be down at the House this evening, because the result of to-night's debate is to be, so some one said, of crucial importance to my career."

All Robert's influence was required to obtain seats for James Cumming, Trottie, and Rollo Croft in the visitor's gallery of the House that night. There was no end-of-the-session dulness about Parliament, and this night had been much talked of. Older men of

greater weight in politics than any one of Robert's age could possibly be, were to speak; but there could be no doubt that the event most looked forward to, and most talked of, was the speech of Mr. Darley, the young under-secretary.

A curious tribute to the strength of the impression he had produced in the last year as a public speaker, an orator, was the fact that his minor office was hardly ever in any way referred to. The under-secretary was in no way connected with Robert Darley, in the eyes of the public. To the world of newspaper-readers, he was Mr. Darley, the brilliant and gifted young orator, and, incidentally, the member for Bramwood.

The House was fairly warm when Robert rose in his place, dropping in his seat, as he did so, a little pile of papers connected with the Discretionary Limit Supply Bill. There were carefully drawn diagrams of the interiors of ships of war, pages of statistics, and all sorts of naval records, amongst those papers; and it is probable that no man in the House knew less about the facts contained in these documents than did Robert Darley. It was characteristic of the man's method in public speaking, that he never referred to a note of any kind in the course of his speeches.

There were congratulatory and expectant murmurs from various parts of the House when Robert, nervously unbuttoning his frock coat, stood up to address the Chair.

His had been an essentially picturesque figure on the political stage. Springing across the horizon of

the unknown and insignificant into the full glare of the world of celebrity — the celebrity of an orator — as Robert had done, he appealed to all that is strongest in the majority of men, — to the people's emotional side.

He began to speak, plunging without preliminaries into the subject of the hour. Trottie, traces of the pain of that evening in the moonlight still showing in her face, saw then, or fancied she saw, all in Robert which had won for him renown. His tones were quick, nervous, and incisive; his style, for an Englishman, a little florid; and his method of rushing to the verge of a crisis, holding his hearers there and dazzling them with sudden glances on either side of the precipice, whilst he carried them on to his desired end, — all this, Trottie thought very fascinating, though she did not understand very much more than did Rollo Croft the matter under debate.

Robert was speaking in exactly the same impassioned tones, and his style was the same breathless, vivid eloquence which, in connection with the speech at the E—— Club during the previous week, the "Morning Herald" had called "something very closely allied to genius!" There was one man in the House however, a prominent member of the party to which Robert belonged, and one of the oldest men in Parliament, who did not like the young orator's style on this occasion. He leaned over to the man behind Darley, and whispered, "For Heaven's sake, tell him to slow down!"

Middle Greyness

So far the member for Bramwood had done nothing for the measure before the House. He had simply fascinated a large proportion of his hearers with the daring brilliancy of his early flights, — the dazzling colouring and vivid plausibility of the man who sways a crowd, without the crowd knowing why or to what end. "By and by," thought the Defence Party, "he will take up the bill itself and, applying all these fireworks to that, will send it flaring into the Constitution on a big majority."

Robert's speech grew a little looser, his metaphors a little more lurid in colouring; and once or twice he paused for an instant to clear his throat, a thing extraordinary in him, and, wiping his forehead nervously with his handkerchief, blundered over the end of a sentence. Then, gradually, there crept over the minds of the most far-seeing men in the House a conviction, first, that the motion Robert was supporting would be defeated; and, second, that the part of his speech in which the bill itself should be really handled, would never come.

His first sentence had been his most brilliant; his last, up to that point, his weakest. His opening had been flooded with the light of a picturesque plausibility so closely allied to the vim and fire of the Bayswater speech and other of his triumphs, as to be indistinguishable from that finished eloquence. It had told of a handling of the bill, an attitude of real strength to come, which would carry the motion before the House by acclamation almost. It had been richly redolent

of the strong oratory which in so short a time had placed Robert Darley in the position he then occupied.

Gradually the foundation of his style faded out of it, leaving only its four walls of passion, colouring, nervous excitement, and breathless speed. The gaudily attractive streamers of his plausibility fluttered obtrusively over the charred remains of the now apparently burnt-out strength with which men had credited him.

Still, Robert Darley's speech was a thing to hold inexperienced minds spell-bound. Still, he sniffed the intoxicating atmosphere of his success, and his nervous sentences were highly coloured pictures. But the House of Commons is a great school of public speaking. Men who sit long on its benches catch quickly the undercurrent of a speaker's mind. Even James Cumming, in his seat in the visitor's gallery, had an uneasy consciousness that the situation was in some way a little strained. Trottie knew nothing, save that she was hot, excited, and nervous.

There was a man sitting a little to the right of where Robert stood, and in the bench in front of the member for Bramwood. His silk hat was tilted carelessly over his head, and his hands were sunk deep in his pockets. This man hated Darley with that hatred which is half envy and half contempt. Suddenly, and as Robert paused for the fourth or fifth time to clear his throat, the man who hated the member for Bramwood leaned towards his left-hand neighbour, and whispered : —

Middle Greyness

"This man is a rank charlatan. I thought as much a year ago."

Robert distinctly heard this remark, and a shiver ran through his whole body as the words reached him. The man who had spoken, and who was of course a voter on Robert's side of the House, turned at the moment of Darley's shiver, and smiled ironically at him.

Robert raised one hand to his collar, but continued speaking. Two or three minutes passed, and Rollo Croft said afterwards, that in those few minutes his friend had uttered some of the most "grotesquely beautiful and luridly powerful" sentences he had ever heard. And then, suddenly, a strange thing happened to the member for Bramwood.

A look came into his face which frightened the men who saw it, and baffled utterly their after attempts at description. There was the insolence of triumph in it, and the agony of failure. There was the sparkle and glitter of that intoxication which his success had brought him; and this showed weirdly through a look of mad, hungry longing; a savage desire to break away from everything; a bound into excess. And over the whole wild look hung a shadow of despair.

Robert Darley stopped speaking. He had not mentioned the name of the measure before the House. He raised one hand tremulously, and reeled against the man next him. Two or three little cries issued from the galleries. Robert's grey lips parted again; and he was heard to say: —

The Black Streak

"It is on these grounds, Mr. Speaker, that I would ask —"

And then, as two or three members closed round the reeling man, his voice died away into a hoarse whisper; and Robert Darley was led, almost carried, out of the Chamber and into an adjoining room. Where, shortly afterwards, James Cumming and Rollo Croft visited him.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE FALL

THE failure of James Cumming's adopted son was as bitter and complete as the failure of a brilliant man generally is. How complete the failure, and how fatal the fall, was not perhaps clearly understood by any one, save the man himself, and, possibly, his ex-secretary.

Humanity's mediocrities may fall and fall, and rise to fall again. When the really strong man fails, his collapse is generally sad and hopeless. When brilliancy bursts, then generally, its fragments fly to mud for interment.

When James Cumming was hurrying from the room adjoining the Chamber of the House, after having seen his adopted son reclining, white and trembling, on a couch round about which stood various friends, he was stopped by the doctor who had just administered a stimulant to Robert.

"Do you happen to know if there has been any trace of insanity in Mr. Darley's family, Mr. Cumming; either on the father's or the mother's side?"

"Good God, no, sir! None that I know of."

Mr. Cumming spoke in a nervous, flustered tone. And when he turned and hurried off to find his

daughter, the doctor stared after him, surprised by the coarsely emphatic nature of his reply to a simple question. Half an hour later, Robert Darley rose from the couch on which he had been lying, and, walking out of the House on Rollo Croft's arm, drove with that gentleman to West Kensington.

A couple of days after this disastrous evening, James Cumming drove into town from Teddington, intending, amongst other things, to call on his adopted son, from whom, to his surprise, he had heard nothing since the collapse of two days before. Having an appointment in the city at an early hour, he left home without glancing at his morning papers, and hurried off to town. As he left the solicitor's office in which his appointment had been kept, the lawyer said, looking curiously at his client: —

"This is an unfortunate breakdown of Mr. Darley's, is it not?"

"Very," said the rich man, shortly. And then he left the room, and, entering his brougham outside, told the coachman to drive to a club in the West end of the town. Arrived in the smoking-room of his club, James Cumming lit a cigar and settled down to look at the morning papers. At that moment, a city merchant whom he knew slightly, strolled towards him, and, wishing Mr. Cumming good-morning, took a seat in the chair next him.

"Queer thing, this defeat of the Government, Mr. Cumming," said the city man.

Now James Cumming took no interest whatever

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in politics, save as they affected his adopted son. Still he knew that a Government defeat was a serious matter, so he said: "Why, bless me, you don't mean to say the Government has been defeated?"

"Certainly I do. Haven't seen the papers this morning?"

"No, I was just opening the 'Times' when you came up." James Cumming dropped the heavy paper on the floor as he spoke. "But I would much rather hear it from you. One has to wade through such a fearful quantity in the papers."

"Well, I thought you of all people would be posted in the details," said the merchant, in some surprise; "if only because of Mr. Darley's unfortunate position in the matter. But surely you must have been told about his appearance in the House last night?"

James Cumming leaned forward in his chair, with a look of serious fear creeping over his heavy face. His fear made him speak abruptly.

"Look here, Mr. Howell; I know nothing whatever about anything that has happened in connection with Parliament, since Robert Darley left the House the evening before last; and I beg you will tell me anything you know."

"Well," said the merchant, after a moment's pause; "all I know about it is known to every newspaper reader in the land this morning. It is simply that the Government was defeated last night on the Discretionary Limit Supply Bill, by a majority of five; and that Mr. Darley was asked to leave the House."

"Leave the — Asked to what?" exclaimed Mr. Cumming, in a voice which caused a dozen heads to be turned in his direction. "What on earth does that mean? Asked to leave the House; on what grounds?"

The business man's quick temper was beginning to rise at his questioner's angry, domineering tone, and he replied shortly: —

"I was not present myself; but I am informed that Mr. Darley came into the Chamber, and, taking his seat just before the division, tried to address the House, despite the efforts of his friends to prevent it. The papers say he was evidently not in a condition to appear in public; and that, ignoring the Speaker's request to resume his seat, he created a disturbance, and was forcibly removed from the Chamber. My informant says Darley was hopelessly intoxicated; but of course I cannot offer an opinion myself. It is stated to-day that he will resign his seat, and —"

The merchant rose to his feet, for James Cumming had leaned back in his chair, gasping like a man choking.

"Let me bring you something, Mr. Cumming. I'm sorry I touched on so painful a subject; but really I had no idea at first of its being news to you. Let me call for a glass of brandy."

James Cumming straightened his shoulders, and coughed huskily, as he said: —

"No, no! Sit down. I don't want anything.

The shock of all this is rather sudden, that's all. But tell me, Mr. Howell, — of course you know really, — is the thing all true? Tell me everything you know, and forgive my abruptness."

Touched by the evident distress of a man he had regarded as being possessed of very little feeling of any kind, the merchant lowered his voice, and spoke as kindly as he could.

"I am afraid I must say that all I have told you is absolutely true, Mr. Cumming. Of course, there may be circumstances I know nothing of, which would alter — which —" The man paused from sheer inability to find anything that he could say of a consoling nature. "There may be something which would throw a different light on the matter; but my informant was S—— who helped to get Darley to leave his seat. I expect the shock of his breakdown the night before had upset him, and — Well, you know, men will give way under those circumstances. It is a sad business, and I assure you I am most sincerely sorry. He showed all the promise of being a great man; and now it is said he will never be seen in the House again. I am told that in view of the disturbance created, and his refusal to leave the Chamber, that he would be asked to resign his seat even if he did not voluntarily do so."

"Good heavens! And this is all a matter of an evening."

"You see the crisis was a trying one. During yesterday, Darley must have learned that his break-

down would very likely mean defeat to the Government. He is a very young man to be in such a position as that; and, despite the wonderful power he has shown as a speaker, I don't think the attitude forced upon him was justifiable — wise anyhow. I have seen a Government defeated practically by the brilliancy of one member of the Opposition; and I have seen a Government saved practically by the strength of one fine speaker. But I never heard of one man's failure, one man's breakdown in a speech, causing the defeat of his Government. The bill ought never to have been allowed to reach such a stage. The fact is, Darley's party have been so dazzled by the manner in which he has swept whole crowds along with his eloquence, that I believe the safety of this risky measure, in which only the Defence party were really interested, was trusted entirely to him; and in my opinion the Government deserve their defeat."

There was little more to learn or be said. James Cumming just glanced at the Parliamentary columns of the "Times;" but he felt instinctively that the whole wretched story was true. Then he left his club and drove to the brown-stone fronted house off Pall Mall. The imperturbable Barlow, in reply to questions, said that his master had not been in his chambers for a couple of days, but had sent for letters from Mr. Rollo Croft's house in Kensington. The rich man drove then to The Odalisque, and was ushered into one of the most curiously beautiful rooms in London,

whilst Croft's factotum was sent for. All he learned was, that the artist had left orders for a couple of portmanteaux to be sent to Paris by that afternoon's train, and had himself left the house with Mr. Darley in the morning.

By this time, Mr. Cumming's intolerant spirit had overcome, temporarily at all events, the pain and regret which the first shock of the news of his adopted son's disgrace had brought to him; and when, having driven back to the house off Pall Mall, he sat down in Robert's study to write to the absent man, he was in a white heat of anger.

"Your failure to communicate to me news of any of the important events of the past two days," he wrote, "is on a par with the disgraceful nature of your appearance in Parliament last night. Do you recognise no duty of respect, or even courtesy, to the man who has brought you up from childhood, and placed you in the position you occupied up till two days ago? Remember, sir, before you continue trifling with me, that you have absolutely no claim on me for your support even, not to mention the means to live the unnecessarily extravagant life you have led. You have been given everything which can be given to a young man to ensure his success in life, and not only have you failed miserably, when your course was clear and easy; but now, having added shame and disgrace to your humiliation, you leave England without even condescending to tell me of your whereabouts."

The Fall

James Cumming had never heard of the advice given a young diplomat by the statesman who said, "Never write anything, and never burn anything that is written." His intolerance, too, was as strong as his nature was weak, and Robert Darley disgraced, Robert Darley a failure, was some one in whom he had no interest, for whom he had no atom of sympathy. Once convinced that his adopted son's prospects of success in life were gone, and James Cumming would never willingly see his face again.

His anger then prevented James Cumming from feeling much sorrow in the matter; but as he drove out to Teddington that evening, after having had all the miserable details of Robert's disgrace forced upon him from a dozen different quarters during the afternoon, then the weak man groaned more than once in the privacy of his brougham.

He realised to the full, in that summer evening's drive home, how entirely, during the past five years, his life and mind had been wrapped up in Robert's career; how empty and purposeless was the path looming before him, how comfortless his prospect, with no son to win fame and success under the influence of his wealth and his guidance. James Cumming thought of all this, and sighed heavily, as his carriage drew up at the front door of The Elms. But from that point his intolerance was ample warrant against any recurrence of the simply sorrowful feeling of that drive home in the evening light.

The rich man's daughter met her father in the

hall, when he entered the house; and he could not help seeing, when he looked at her pale face with its sad expression of sympathy and regret, that Trottie must have learned of the story of failure and disgrace.

"Oh, Father dear, I am so sorry," said Trottie, as she greeted the weary man, "I am so very sorry."

And that was all. It was not merely some unfortunate accident to be deplored. She could say no more, and what she had said seemed very little; but James Cumming stooped and kissed his daughter's forehead, a rare thing for him to do; and he was touched, to an extent which surprised himself, by Trottie's sweet womanly sympathy.

One of the gardeners employed at The Elms had, with more generosity than tact, handed to Trottie, as she was stepping into the Fairie that morning, his own copy of a radical newspaper, at the same time calling her attention to the news "about Mr. Robert" contained therein. The radical paper told the painful story with considerable gusto, and elaborated, with reiterated regret, and strong local colouring, on the actual causes of "the unfortunate young member's ejection from the House." Its head lines were alliteratively forcible; its knowledge of detail was painfully accurate; and poor, tender-hearted Trottie, all unversed either in the methods of sensational journalism, or the standards by which men of the world are judged, blushed to the roots of her brown hair, and felt her very fingers tingling with shame, as she sat in the Fairie reading of her brother's disgrace.

The Fall

It was typical of her nature that, whereas of late, both before and since her rejection of Robert's offer of marriage, she had grown to look upon the young member less and less as a brother, and more every day as merely her cousin; yet now, as she read of the humiliating circumstances of his fall, she thought of Robert Darley, instinctively and without question, as her real brother.

It was all so painful, and in the light of the events of the past year so bewilderingly sudden, that James Cumming's daughter could arrive at no definite conclusion regarding the matter of Robert's disgrace. There were two feelings uppermost in her heart as she sat in her room that night, after offering up a prayer for Robert which, if purity is loved in Heaven, must have drawn tears from the eyes of angels. These two feelings were, firstly, a desire to talk about it all with that other brother of hers, the brother in Fleet Street who did not count success as the greatest thing in life; and, secondly, a wish that she could find that strong, rugged secretary from Australia, whose words, spoken in Robert's study, had thrilled her so with their power, and beg of him to help the man who had asked her to be his wife, now that he was in disgrace.

And at the moment at which Trottie sat in her pretty, dainty room at The Elms, thinking these things, Robert Darley himself was sitting with Rollo Croft, the artist, in the upper room of a night café in Paris, revelling in the atmosphere which he had said

was suggested to him by the music and the sunset light on the Thames at Surbiton.

"By Jove, you'll never understand what a relief it is to me to be here with you, Rollo," said Robert, looking over his raised glass at the artist.

"Ah! Well, perhaps not. Your secretary from the Antipodes, with the dry humour in which he was so accomplished an artist, assured you that the occasion of your weirdly beautiful speech the other night, was to be the crucial point in your political career. The full subtlety of his joke comes over me with irresistible charm at this moment, and, assuring you that it was certainly the most caviarre, I drink to the 'most crucial point in your political career.'"

Part V

CHAPTER XXVII

"THE WATERS OF LETHE ARE BEST"

If men are creatures of habit, then assuredly are habits creatures of association. It is extraordinary, the power and influence, conscious and unconscious, of these things we call associations.

There was a man once who lived on a sheep-run in the far south of Patagonia, and almost within sight of Tierra del Fuego, where one feels as though one has fallen over the edge of the world. This man used to pick a certain uninteresting-looking white flower which grew on the plains, and was about as pretty to look at as are the extraordinary floral trophies in calico which men in London streets still buy for a penny each and stick in their button-holes. The man on the Patagonian sheep-run did not put these weeds in his coat, neither did he admire their appearance to any great extent. But — he only received a letter once every six months — he said that their scent was to him the smell of the Crystal Palace, and he liked the home-sick feeling it gave him to

sniff that odour. He had lived in Norwood before he became a Patagonian.

There is a man living now in Lagos, West Africa, who smiles in an absolutely insane manner, and will, in the middle of conversation, go off into a dream from which nothing short of a tornado will rouse him, if he hears a bar — two notes — of a song known to fame under the title of "Mrs. Enery Awkins." And the curious part of it is, that what he dreams of with that imbecile grin on his face is the picture of a beautiful woman sitting at an open piano in a London drawing-room, playing a German waltz, the dreamy sweetness of which makes one's head dizzy.

When the man called Arthur Crossland stepped into the corridor outside Robert Darley's study on the evening of his dismissal from the post of secretary to the member for Bramwood, he reached over to the hat-rack and, without knowing in the least what he was doing, took down a hat. There were three hats on that rack, and one of them Crossland had only once worn during the period of his secretaryship. It was this hat which he put on his head when he walked out into the street with Satan. It differed from the others in that it was a soft felt of the kind called "slouch," whilst they were of silk. Then, too, the little triangular label on the inside of its crown bore the legend, "James Carberry. General Storekeeper. Wydah."

Sitting in Robert Darley's study, he had been Mr. Crossland, the deferential, self-contained secretary.

"The Waters of Lethe are Best"

The felt hat brought with it a whiff of gum-leaves, and made the man invite his dog to, "Come out into the moonlight and breathe." The man in the street, with the soft hat on his head, was the bushman from the gunyah by Warroo Gully; the beachcomber, and world's tramp. And the little laugh which escaped him as he turned into Pall Mall, and which caused the black dog to look nervously up into his face, was the laugh to which the men in the bar-room of the Wydah hotel had objected.

Walking slowly down Pall Mall, the man who during the past year had been alert and active in all things dropped into the lounging, careless stride of the man who more often than not wears knee-boots, with perhaps a spur on one of them; who is accustomed to walk through long grass, and there to notice the track of a stray heifer, in which animal he may have not the smallest interest. Turning up Regent Street and into Piccadilly, the man entered an hotel bar and called for some whiskey. For twelve months he had not tasted spirits, and had drunk only coffee and claret.

When, followed by his dog, he left the hotel bar, he wandered aimlessly into Charing Cross Road, and from there along, and up and down, through many streets, without knowing in the least where he was going or what he was doing. After a long time he paused, hearing a church clock strike twelve. The street down which he was walking when the sound of the clock striking caused him to stand still, looked

busy despite the lateness of the hour, and was well-lighted. Looking up at the windows of the house opposite which he had paused, he saw that he was facing a rather famous Fleet Street hotel.

"Satan," he said, looking languidly down at the dog, "let us camp here. It is not so good as the gunyah certainly; but it 's better than Pall Mall. It will be less choky, fool dog."

So the two entered the hotel, and Crossland engaged a room and obtained some supper for his dog before retiring for the night. When the next day came, he sent a messenger to the house in the street off Pall Mall, giving him a bunch of keys to hand to Barlow, with a request that his baggage might be sent to the Fleet Street hotel.

For four days he wandered idly about in the neighbourhood of the Temple and Whitefriars, dazed and confused, dreamily picking up the threads of the old life he had dropped so entirely. Then, waking early on the fifth morning, with a queer fancy in his aching head, he drove to Paddington station, and, journeying down to Oxford, spent five days at the old hotel in the High, from the windows of which he had, years before, watched his two sons as they passed to and fro with other college men.

He was passing through a phase of intense weariness, the reaction which follows a long strain of unnatural nervous pressure. So tired was the man from Warroo Gully, that for days he hardly knew whether he was disgusted or not. So exhausted was he after

the unceasing tension of the past year, that for days he forgot to be cynical, forgot even to smoke, and remembered nothing save the occasional feeding of the black dog.

Then, when to a certain extent his body had recovered itself, a sudden wave of realities swept over the man's mind, while he stood gazing at a train steaming out of a railway station near Oxford. He remembered the approaching end of the Parliamentary session, and the Discretionary Limit Supply Bill; the fact that he had been dismissed from his son's service, and could no longer exert the influence of his mind upon the plastic surface of Robert Darley's mind. He who through all these throbbing, weary months had poured the whole strength of his soul, the whole colouring of his mind, into the life carelessly led by his successful son, he was dismissed with a cheque for six months' salary, and by the child of his own flesh and blood.

"And, Satan, my friend, we did n't even take the cheque, now I come to think of it. That was unbusinesslike, and unworthy our greyness."

Crossland smiled; and the bitterness of it all began then to creep slowly into the lonely heart of the man from the gunyah, as, leaving Oxford, he returned to Fleet Street to watch his son's movements at the "crucial point."

Arrived in London, Crossland, because he had been there before, proceeded to the hotel in Fleet Street at which he had stayed prior to the Oxford visit.

Middle Greyness

There was a sense of waiting and expectancy in the man's mind which prevented his adopting any definite course of action. He read hungrily the political news of the daily papers, and even wandered in an uneasy restless mood as far as the Palace gates at Westminster, there to watch the cabs rattling in and out, his dog at his side, and an anxious longing look on his thin face. Already the ex-secretary's appearance had undergone great change. His beard was becoming shaggy-looking, for want of clipping. And there was much in his bent figure, his slouch hat, and his general suggestion of relapse, to connect the man outside the Palace yard at Westminster, with the bushman, the beachcomber of the South.

Sitting in a dark corner of the smoking-room of his Fleet Street hotel, Crossland read, picking up first one morning paper, and then another, the account of Robert Darley's breakdown in his speech on the Discretionary Limit Supply Bill. Any one watching the man's face as he studied this story of plausibility collapsed, the pride of success fallen, would have found it hard to judge from the signs to be read there, what his feelings might be. There was no trace of disappointment amongst the expressions which flitted across the strong face. There was sorrow and bitterness, and there was a look of almost tender pity and sadness. Then there came into his black eyes, more than once as he scanned up and down the closely printed columns, the cynical look of the strong pessi-

mist who says, "I knew it. I knew that it must be so." But weariness was uppermost amongst the expressions on the grey face, and sadness tinged the whole changing succession of looks.

He saw the ghost of his own strength as, by the force of previous suggestion, it showed in the opening of his son's speech. His lips quivered as, reading on, he saw the cleverness of mere plausibility standing alone. His hands shook, and his eyes glistened, as he saw the growing weakness, the light of failure shining through the gaps in the walls of the artificial structure, when it tottered on its shallow base. Then he pushed the papers wearily aside, and rose from his seat in the dark corner, as Satan, in silent sympathy, rubbed his black muzzle against his hand.

"Satan, fool dog," he muttered, "the black streak lives, after all, from one generation to another; and — it's stronger than suggestion, Satan. It forces out the chip in the mosaic, dog. Let us go out into the street and smoke."

As Crossland wandered about with his dog that evening, newsboys, selling late editions of the evening papers, yelled strange cries in the man's ears, which made him shiver and start angrily round with a hunted look in his face.

"Pro'bul defeet uv th' Gov'ment! 'Star'! Latest 'Noos'! Orl th' winners! 'Echo' — speshul! Kerlapse 'er Mister Darley! Winners! Pro'bul 'feet Gov'ment! H' yah, sir! 'Noos' or 'Star'?"

Still the man from Warroo waited in uncertain ex-

pectancy of something to come. Still he smoked, and heaped disjointed cynicism on the head of the faithful brute that walked beside him as he wandered aimlessly about the great city. Then, early on the following morning, sitting alone on a seat in the green space facing Cleopatra's Needle, he read, from the same paper over which Trottie afterwards blushed and shivered, the account of Robert Darley's last appearance in the House, the completion and bitterness of his fall, and the subsequent defeat of the Government.

At last the man dropped his paper and motioned with one hand to the dog at his feet. He pushed the slouch hat back from his forehead, till his unbrushed grey hair showed under its brim; and the expression of his face, as he rose from the seat in the green space, contained little enough of sadness and nothing of tenderness. It was the look of the world's tramp. Just so the bushman had looked when he gave his horse the first cut with a quince switch, on the night of his mad gallop along Warroo track to the gunyah. Just so look vagabonds in the South and East, when they leave one of the world's beaches to drift on to another. And the expression was an intensified growth, a coarsened exaggeration, a grosser finality, of the look which had made Rollo Croft stare at Robert Darley's face, as the latter gazed through the glowering sunset lights to the spot where a band played on the banks of the Thames, on an evening some three months after the end of the bushman's last visit to

the old world. Satan rose to follow the man of the gunyah.

"He has emptied his bottle of success, Satan; and he 's turned to the waters of Lethe already. Come on, fool dog. The waters of Lethe are best — after all!"

CHAPTER XXVIII

A VAGABOND'S YOUNGER SON

WHEN Will, the younger of the beachcomber's two sons, first entered Fleet Street, he realised that he was alone in the world.

He had no wish to cut off old associations as such; he had been told that he need not consider himself banished from James Cumming's roof; and he had parted on affectionate terms with his brother Robert. But something in his fore-knowledge of the life that for him was to be, joined issue with the spirit of his own independence, in causing him to feel that for the present it were better that he should regard The Elms as something outside and apart from himself and his life.

To James Cumming, he felt that he owed a debt which was considerably lightened by the millionaire's evident willingness to part from him; and, in his gratitude for all the rich man had done towards bringing him up to manhood, there had been, since the telling of the story which came after Will's last dinner at The Elms, no trace of affection.

If there was to have been any coming together of the two brothers after Will took up his abode in Fleet

Street, then the younger had felt that the advances must come from Robert. Poor, unknown, and starting on a career in the preliminaries to which there had been little enough promise of any kind, Will could not have made advances to his brilliant, successful brother, with all his surroundings of wealth and power. And Robert had made no single sign of advance, and had not once seen his brother since their parting at The Elms on the morning of Will's leave-taking with James Cumming.

James Cumming's daughter Trottie was the only associate of his old life who had made any advance to Will in the loneliness of his new and chosen life. And Trottie represented all that he clung to in the days that had been, as something he would like to win touch of in the days that should be.

When Will read in the papers of Robert's breakdown in his speech on the Discretionary Limit Supply Bill, he wrote expressing his sympathy and regret. When, a couple of days afterwards, he read of that painful episode which, preceding the defeat of the Government, showed Robert's fall in the light of a final and humiliating collapse as a politician; then Will strayed so far from the bounds of his domain as to call at the brown-fronted house in the street off Pall Mall. Like James Cumming, he was referred to Mr. Rollo Croft, and also, like James Cumming, he was only able to gather from the servants in the West Kensington house, that his brother had gone to Paris.

He had been moved by a desire to put his hand on Robert's shoulder, and say, "Poor old chap! Don't knock under. Come and stay with me a while till this is forgotten." Robert did not want him, however, and had disappeared without a word. So Will, with a sigh, put the matter from him, and walked quietly back to the field of his own little struggles, his early wanderings in the life not lived in a groove.

Will had been caught in one of those traps in which most young men who enter Fleet Street with pockets not absolutely empty, are reduced to the inevitable pennilessness of the journalistic beginner who begins alone.

The old philosophy which Carlyle expressed in the terseness of his "Root, hog, or die!" may be studied in its most perfect form amongst young men who, without the drawbacks of what some one has called the "home-shelter system," yet are cursed with the possession of sufficient money to obtain food and clothing without effort, when they try to gain admittance to the fourth estate. For until the journalistic hog roots, he will do no real work; and it is part of the beauty of the eternal fitness of things, that, with a few notable exceptions, none but really prime, healthy animals can pass through the rooting process into the fattening pens of assured footholds in Fleet Street. Those whose bristles are not sufficiently upstanding; those whose tusks are but timid, half developed things; those whose feeding capacities are insufficiently endless: those, in fine, who are unfit, whether by reason

of their sensitiveness, or their incapability, turn off into other pastures, or else succumb during the rooting period.

About twelve months before Robert Darley's breakdown, Will arrived at one of those phases in which young men who are living alone run three fingers nervously through their hair, or bite their thumb-nails — according to individual habit in such matters — and say, "Something must be done." It is a forecast of "Root, hog, or die!"

The very day after that upon which Will reached this stage, he learned, by the perusal of the advertisement columns of a morning paper, that certain sub-editors, assistant editors, and other journalists, were required to form the staff of a new paper to be issued somewhere in the North. This appealed to Will as being a really grand opportunity for him. So he wrote promptly, and with considerable enthusiasm, to "439. Z. Daily Herald Office. Fleet Street." In the course of a few days, Will was informed, by the medium of a neatly lithographed circular, that the gentleman to whom the assistant editor's place would be given, would be required to invest in the concern the sum of three hundred pounds; he who was lucky enough to secure the sub-editorship, two hundred and fifty; the chief reporter, so much; and so throughout the staff investment would be required, "in order that the paper — a long felt want in the district — may be started on a sufficiently co-operative basis to ensure its smooth and successful working."

Middle Greyness

Will Darley was by no means so easy a catch as were some of the members of the literary staff of that promising journal. He wasted a good deal of the valuable time of the promoter of the concern, by making all sorts of inquiries, before, having managed to raise the money out of the coming payments of his annuity, he finally paid over his three hundred pounds in return for sixty shares in the new paper, in connection with which he was to occupy the proud position of assistant editor.

He then journeyed to that portion of the black country in which the new journal was to have its habitation. For perhaps a month he was induced, in different ways, to canvass for support for the coming organ of democracy. Then, with a flourish of trumpets worthy the co-operative basis on which the concern was started, the first issue of the "North Country Times" burst upon the waiting world of manufacturing Britain, in all the glory of its block head-lines and illustrated supplement.

Will carefully filed a copy of the first issue, with red ink crosses marked against the columns containing his work. Had vague ideas of having Trottie's name put down on the free subscribers' list. The editor rather disgusted his assistant, by telling him not to put so much "padding" in his "Notes of To-day." Also, it was rather disconcerting to note that no one could be found who had actually bought and paid for, a copy of the "North Country Times."

Will made up his mind that this state of things

would soon be altered, however; and he was seriously disappointed when, after its third issue, the new paper closed its doors, and was decently buried by its original promoter. There could be no doubt about the paper being really defunct. And so Will's first bubble burst; and he returned to Fleet Street, poorer to the extent of all the money upon which he could then lay his hands, and richer by having accomplished and passed through a certain almost inevitable phase.

Will was able to secure the same rooms in Holborn which he had occupied before assuming assistant editorial dignities. Then, having disposed of a portion of his last remaining five-pound note in the purchase of a little present in connection with the birthday of wealthy James Cumming's daughter, he came face to face with the "Root, hog, or die!" question. Exactly where and how to begin rooting was a difficulty which somewhat perplexed Will for a day or two, and might have worried him until the last remaining sovereign of the five-pound note had disappeared, had he not, by a fortunate accident, happened to explain his position to T. J. Rodell. That was in the full flood of T. J. Rodell's fame, when he was undoubtedly a prince of the penny-a-lining brigade of Whitefriars.

When Will Darley dined — and of late he had demonstrated to himself the soundness of the contention that a man may, even three or four times a week, omit dinner as a feature of the day, and still live — he dined at Jarley's in Ludgate Circus. Having on three

occasions sat opposite T. J. Rodell at Jarley's, he, during the fourth meeting, got into conversation with the great "copy" maker. When they had dined five times at the same table, T. J. Rodell wrote a letter of introduction to the editor of the "Evening Mercury," commending to that gentleman as a "very clever young journalist," his "friend, Mr. Darley;" and mentioning that he would regard "as a personal favour" anything which could be done towards finding an opening for his protégé.

This letter Will took, after many expressions of gratitude to its writer, to the editorial sanctum of the "Evening Mercury." The editor of the "Mercury" at that time was a good-natured though weak-minded man, whose literary staff already included two nephews, a stepson, and three hopeless drunkards who at different periods of his past life had helped him financially. Apart from this, the staff of his paper was considerably over-manned, and he had to tell Will that, much as he should have liked to oblige Mr. T. J. Rodell, he could not make another permanent opening on the "Mercury."

"I'll tell you what I can manage," he said. "I can have your name put down in the reporter's book as one of the outside staff, and then accept your copy, when possible, at the usual rates. That will give you a chance of showing what you can do."

Will jumped at the offer. He had since learned the full meaning of penny-a-lining, and become known to one or two specimens of the class called, sadly

enough, "Fleet Street hacks." He was at first amused by them all. Then, he began to hate most of them. Finally, he grew interested in several of the race.

He accustomed himself to calling at the "Mercury" office in the morning, as though the paper could not possibly have been issued without him. There he would linger about the reporter's room on the off chance of being given a piece of work not taken up by any of the over-manned staff, or given to any of the four or five senior penny-a-liners who, occupying the same position in relation to the journal as was now his, had for years wandered up and down Whitefriars on the lookout for copy, which would earn for them a penny a line, or about eighteen shillings a column, in the pages of the "Evening Mercury."

He learned to loathe the "Tape" and the "News Agency," as only a penny-a-liner can loathe those useful institutions. He went through the grind of gathering a piece of news which seemed good and exclusive; of rushing with it to the "Mercury" office, and there seeing a sub-editor reeling the snake-like "Tape" through his fingers, and scribbling furiously, as a conversation like the following took place between the man on the staff, and the man from the street:

"What have you got there?"

"Something really good for your fourth edition. Look here! A man named Austin — examination in bankruptcy closed — Master in Bankruptcy said would instruct public prosecutor with reference to alleged perjury of a baronet who — "

Middle Greyness

"Hold on! What 's this coming over the 'Tape'?" Quotes from "Tape" running through his fingers: "'Case of Mr. James Austin — possible prosecution of a baronet for perjury — Master said under circumstances — ' That 's it, I think. Sha'n't want your copy this trip — Thank you!"

Will learned many curious things during these days, and wore out more shoe-leather in a week than he had ever before worn in a month. But he had not the true spirit of the successful penny-a-liner. He was good-natured enough, and ready enough for work; but — In fine, his tusks and bristles were not those of the really prime hog of the Fleet Street rooting ground. So it happened that he did not at once begin to amass wealth; though on one notable occasion he did receive twenty-four shillings and ninepence for his week's work. Usually, the "Mercury" paid him from sixteen to twenty-one shillings every Saturday. In one awful week he only reached four and eightpence. It is true, however, that in this last mentioned week he had only spent one shilling and fourpence in 'bus fares.

At the time of Robert's collapse in Parliament, the guinea and two guinea cheques for column articles appearing in different papers were becoming less rare to Will Darley; and, in the course of a few more months, he would be able to once more draw upon his annuity. Therefore, though depressed and melancholy at times, and never content in an atmosphere which was extremely uncongenial to him,

Will was yet hopeful in the main, and plodded along steadily.

Late one night in early September, Will was walking slowly home, along the Thames Embankment below Westminster. His curiosity was aroused by three figures which the moonlight showed him close to one of the seats facing the river. As he paused on the curb-stone within a few yards of the three figures, Will heard the following snatch of conversation:

"Bless the dawg, what's he licking of my hand for?"

Will noticed that the man who asked the question was a policeman, and that one of the other two figures was that of a big black dog, — a sort of exaggerated greyhound, Will thought, — whilst the third was of a man taller than the policeman, and very much thinner. The taller man sank back onto the seat, and laughed faintly at the policeman's question, as he said: —

"*Noblesse oblige.* The dog thinks, judging from experience, I suppose, that morphia is not good for me; and, seeing your intervention at a time when I was about to indulge, he licks your hand. It's very simple. Ignorance of brute creation makes them grateful. Want of *savoir faire* makes 'em show their gratitude. Want of experience on your part — you 'll pardon my mentioning it — makes you fail to understand the creature's intention in caressing your hand. Satan, fool dog, lie down; and, when in Rome, do as Latin dogs do!"

"Well, you're a bit of a knockout, you are," observed the policeman, adding then, tentatively: "I suppose you're a bit light-'eaded. I don't want to go down to the station, but I think you and your dog'll have to come. This 'ere morphia is poison."

"It has that reputation," said the man on the seat. "But I can't say I ever tried it as a poison. As bottled Lethe, now, it's superb. But, seriously, my friend, is it possible that the smugness of this town goes so far as as to let you lock me up for taking morphia?"

"You see," said the man in uniform, resting one foot on the seat, and bending confidentially towards the owner of the dog, — "you see, I've got to look at it from a legal point uv view, so to speak. Now, you've been drinking —"

"I have also eaten once or twice of late," chuckled the taller man.

"And if," continued the constable, without apparently noticing this unseemly interruption, "I've got lawful and rees'nable grounds fer supposin' you had intentions to take away your life, contrary to Act 'er Parli'ment, you bein' without lawful visible means uv support, it's my duty to arrest you as a vagerbun'. That's where a orfficer's discretion comes in, you see?"

"This is, in fact, paternal government in a nutshell. But yet it would be a pity to arrest me, because of the dog. He gets so out of temper if he's separated from me."

A Vagabond's Younger Son

The policeman put his foot down from the seat to the pavement, and, assuming his final and summing up judicial dignity, said: —

"The dorg is nothin' to do with me — onless 'e 's a stray. But if you can't show me your lawful abode, or fetch some friend to be responsible for you; you 'll have to come along o' me. You don't 'appen to have any friends in London, do you?"

"Let me see. Have we any friends, Satan? Really, dog, you ought to have seen to this; but — I 'm afraid we have n't, any that I know of. Poor London!"

Up to this point, Will had stood silently watching, from the shadow under a young tree by the edge of the footpath. The remarks of the man on the seat had interested him more than a little. So, with no more thought of his own circumstances than would have come to him as an Oxford undergraduate, he yielded to the impulse which made him wish to help the man whose dog was his only friend. Having no desire to explain matters to the representative of law and order, he stepped briskly forward into the moonlight, and, addressing the man on the seat, said: —

"Don't say you have no friends. You must not forget me, you know." Then, turning to the constable, he added, "It 's all right, Sergeant. I will take care of him. He will come with me to my rooms. Here is my card, and — You can manage to get into the 'Ship' I think. If not, you 'll drink our healths to-morrow, will you not? Good-night. Are you ready, my friend?"

The owner of the dog rose from his seat, and turned towards Will. His black eyes had flashed sudden recognition at the moment of Will's stepping forward into the moonlight. He had since been gazing fixedly at the young journalist, whilst a queer, cynical smile hovered about his lips.

"This is very good of you," he muttered; as the two, followed by the black dog, turned away from the surprised policeman. "I should n't like to be locked up, I confess, and — I 've a splitting headache; but — Really, I 've no sort of claim on you; and this is not the Bush."

"Look here," said Will, with some warmth; "if you will give it me, I shall be delighted to have your company; and if you 'll put up with a makeshift bed, we can be very comfortable in my rooms. Anyhow, you 'll come and have a bit of supper with me — Hi, cabby!"

Will had noticed that the thin frame of his new friend shook, and that he staggered somewhat in his walk. So a passing hansom was hailed, and Will stepped aside to allow the stranger to enter it before him.

"I 'm coming to your rooms for supper," said the vagabond owner of Satan. "It 's very good of you — How funny! You don't happen to live near Pall Mall, do you?"

Will explained that Pall Mall was far enough from his field of action; and the pair started for the rooms near the sky in Holborn.

CHAPTER XXIX

BEACHCOMBER TO HIS BEACH

In certain environments, and under certain circumstances, a man may sleep soundly in a wet blanket and suffer nothing in the shape of after-effects. There are circumstances and environments, however, under and in which the same experience will make the same individual a martyr to chronic rheumatism.

During the eight or ten days which intervened between Arthur Crossland's reading of his eldest son's downfall, and his being found on the Thames Embankment by his younger son, he had aged considerably. The waters of Lethe, partaken of on London's beaches, differ in their effects upon men, from the same waters imbibed on the beaches and in the Bush of the far South.

London's beaches are extensive and varied in locality, but to reach them from any other part of the great metropolis one's course must be mainly easterly: and Wapping, Poplar, Shadwell, and Limehouse are names well known to those who drift in their direction.

The man from Warroo had risen from his seat in the green space opposite Cleopatra's Needle, after

reading of Robert Darley's final collapse. Followed by his dog Satan, he had walked slowly along the Embankment with a vague desire in his tired mind to forget the things of this old world, in which the great effort of his life had been so unsuccessful, and to breathe again the desolate freedom which is found under gum-trees. Naturally, therefore, he had reached London's beaches. Arrived there, he encountered stumbling blocks. There was a bank somewhere, leagues away to the westward, from which he could obtain a certain amount of money, a portion of the small annuity which was always his. That was miles away, in the stifling atmosphere of the world which contained the brown-fronted house in the street off Pall Mall. Here on the beach one could make one's self forget. True, the fragrant breath of the gum-trees, and the myriad whispering voices which represent the Spirit of the Bush, — these were not on London's beaches. But, thought the man Crossland, perhaps that is so much the better, because they fight the black streak.

"Satan," the man had muttered in his grey beard, as the two turned into one of the great thoroughfares which, beginning on the beach, lead away through outer London, — "Satan, the black streak is in him. I choked it in me that I might give him the strength without it. But he had it before, dog, — he had it before; and — It is best. We will let the black streak live and kill us if it can. But in the killing, fool dog, we shall live, we shall breathe, and we shall forget."

Beachcomber to His Beach

And so, with the old wild longing for all things lurid, the passionate hatred of the middle greyness, glittering in his black eyes; the man, followed always by his dog, had plunged up to the throat in the Lethe of London's outer edge.

The man who sank exhausted into a chair in Will's room, after struggling up five weary flights of stairs, was dazed and tottering, physically and mentally. With the best of the simple resources at his command, Will prepared a cup of chocolate, and placed a few plain eatables on the table before his guest. Outraged nature seeks relief in unexpected ways at times. Will was as much surprised as pleased to see that within ten minutes, his new friend had drunk half the chocolate, and was sleeping on his, Will's, own narrow bed, as soundly and peacefully as a child.

Will made himself comfortable on the floor, with an ulster and a couple of rugs. When morning came, he was obliged to leave the house and go out about his business. He had a little talk with his vagabond friend, however, whom he saw plainly was not fit to leave the room; and, at the end of their chat, he was quite content to start for the "Mercury" office, leaving Crossland, with his dog at his feet, sitting by the open window in that curtained-off portion of the apartment, which served as a sitting-room.

Will was deeply interested in the old outcast whose conversation showed such strange glimpses of refinement, and even of scholarly culture, in the midst of all the rough carelessness of the half drunken tramp

of Lower Bohemia. Above and beyond all this, there was something in Will's mind, on a par with the feeling which had prevented men in the bar-room of the Wydah hotel from taking active exception to the contemptuous laugh of the man from Warroo, — something which told him that this old vagabond with the black dog, was a white man at bottom, and clean run.

So, wishing his guest Good-morning, he left, saying he would be back early in the evening, and asking Crossland to make whatever use he liked of anything in the room.

"I would n't take any morphia to-day, if I were you," said Will, hesitatingly, as he stood in the doorway. "You are weak now, you know, and you ought to give yourself a chance."

The man from the Bush smiled faintly, and looked down at his dog. "Oh, no," he said. "We don't want any Lethe to-day, do we, Satan? We are tired enough to rest in this comfortable room."

Will, the surface of his still dreamy mind occupied with the sayings and doings of his guest, and the rest of it drenched in Keats, Shelley, and Goethe, hurried away to see if he could extract a few paragraphs from the law courts. The man from Warroo sat at the open window, gazing out over the roofs of the neighbouring houses; through a sun-kissed smoke-drift, past the sky beyond; to a spot ten thousand miles away where tall, ragged gum-trees rustled their crisp leaves against the upper limbs of sombre black-butts, and death-adders dozed under fallen logs, in an

atmosphere faint and heavy with the fragrance of clustered wattle bloom.

And this was his son, he thought, his other son, this unknown wastrel in Fleet Street who confessed to penny-a-lining, and was probably proud to see a column of his "copy" in an evening paper. Crossland laughed quietly, so that the black dog rose to his feet and walked uneasily to the other side of the window. "What's the matter, fool dog?" asked the weary, shaky man in the chair. "This is only as it should be. We took the one who had the making of greatness in him, and brought him within sight of success in the greyness of things. Then the black streak laughed at us, and our strength was no use when he stumbled. Besides, you notice, dog, that he dismissed us; wanted to give us our wages instead of notice. That was quaint, was n't it, Satan, when you reflect that we had been giving him our soul — we can't have more than one between us, because I was always a one soul-sided man — and dying slowly in the middle greyness, that he might live. Oh, there was humour in that, my dog, could we but see it!"

There was a little quiver in the man's voice as he muttered away to his dog, which might have been caused by the effects of Lethe, or, possibly, by bitterness not wholly draped in Lethe.

"So you see, Satan, it is only in keeping with things, that this other one should be nobody. A dreamer who shall dream one half his life, and grind

the other half to fragments on the nether millstones of Fleet Street."

Three or four days passed in this way, for the beachcomber was in a state of lethargy. After the first day, he walked out with Satan into the Temple gardens, and sat in the sunshine, watching students and briefless barristers flitting in and out their chambers in the quaintly beautiful old Inns of Court. At night, he talked to Will Darley, who, tired and often sick with his day's work amongst the scramblers for news in Fleet Street, was comforted to find some one to greet him when he arrived home.

It was very absurd, Will told himself, but he was growing strangely fond of this vagabond, with the ragged grey beard, and the lined, shadowy face. He liked to sit and listen to Satan's master's jerky talk of men and things; and he liked to feel, when he was walking home in the evening, that the old man was there waiting for him. Yet Crossland, when they talked at night, always spoke as though it mattered little what a man might say, and was just as well to think one thing as another. If he pronounced an opinion, that opinion was either a piece of apparently feelingless satire, or of cynicism which spoke of sickness and disgust with all things, and belief in nothing save pain, and the rest of forgetfulness.

The man was disgusted, and he was sick to the very core of him. Also, he was cynical and sufficiently indifferent to anything the future might hold in store, to take no interest whatever in the daily occupation

of this young man whose salt he ate, and who was of his flesh and blood. He did not even care to take the trouble to say anything which might help Will Darley, or give a definite direction to his thoughts.

"Cui bono?" he muttered, when he thought of it. "The black streak will have its own, and what am I?"

But yet when he talked to his son, during those few evenings they spent together in the little room near the sky, it seemed to Will that their position, high up above the roar and bustle of the city, was typical of and appropriate to the man's character. He talked as one who moved through the world, living among men and watching them, with always an amused smile on his face. Living and moving as humans do with a human brain and human eyes that saw; but yet with no emotions, no feelings to be touched by that with which he came in contact. And away up there in the little room in the roof, above the men and the things of men, he commented upon them all with the strong freedom of indifference.

Will had been all dreams and fancies. Now, he was all half-formed theories and undeveloped thought outlines. This grey-bearded man, who talked like a seer and laughed like a fiend, had in his strong mind no fancies, but only lurid realities, no half-formed theories, but only cynical certainties based upon actual touch. And his talk, therefore, came as hot, throbbing life to all the unborn creeds in embryo of Will's mind.

Middle Greyness

On the third evening, Will found that his guest had laid in a stock of little additions to their provision store; and there were several bottles of whiskey in the room. On that evening, also, the man from Warroo talked to Will of Australia, and of the great weird wilderness called the Bush. Before they parted for the night, he gave Will a new volume purchased in Bookseller's Row, and said: —

"Here is a little anchovy for you to take when you don't feel clean enough for Shelley's sweets. This comes out of the Bush, and — Well, it is as good reading as most things."

This was a volume of the works of Adam Lindsay Gordon, the Australian poet.

On the fifth morning of his stay with Will Darley, the ex-secretary walked westward with Satan. He smiled bitterly as he passed the turning out of Pall Mall in which stood the brown-stone fronted house. He called at the bank which long ago had received a communication from a banking house in Pitt Street, Sydney, to the effect that certain moneys were to be placed to the credit of Mr. Arthur Crossland.

The paying teller stared in surprise at the unkempt, haggard-looking old man in a slouch hat, who, some few months before, when calling to pay into his account, had presented an appearance so totally different. The man from the Bush was absolutely indifferent, however, in the matter of the impression he produced on the bank official. Having finished his business, he walked down to the Fleet Street hotel in which he had

formerly stayed, and paid the small amount still owing for his last few days of residence there.

When Will arrived at his room in Holborn that night he was surprised to find no trace of his friend. Still, he told himself, the old man would certainly be in before long. So he made preparations for the little meal they took together at night, and then sat down to wait, and to look through the book of poems Crossland had given him.

Hour after hour passed, and when Will had listened to eleven o'clock being chimed out from two or three steeples which were within sight of his little window, he heard slow uncertain steps on the narrow staircase outside his room. He rose hastily, and stepped to the open door with a lamp in his hand. Then the old tramp Will had found on the Thames Embankment entered the little room, followed by his black dog.

His face was flushed, and his eyes were a little bloodshot. But otherwise he looked just as he had looked when Will left him in the early morning.

"You are late," said Will; in the tone which gives those three familiar words more of the sound of welcome than is contained in a dozen sentences of the conventional, "So glad you've come!" type. The older man's eyes softened as he glanced at the little meal spread out on the table by the window.

"You are a good fellow," he said to Will, "much too good for Fleet Street. But you should n't have waited."

Then they both sat down at the little table; and Will noticed that, though the man with the dusty coat and the ragged beard ate scarcely anything, he drank a good deal of whiskey and water, and talked far more and with greater zest, than he had done during the four previous days.

When their meal was over, the two men talked a little of the poetry of the Australian writer whose work Crossland had recommended to Will as an anchovy. Later on, Will, who during these five days had been so careful to avoid anything like prying into his guest's affairs that he had not even asked the vagabond's name, said: —

"Do you think you will ever again go to see this wonderful Bush?"

The man from Warroo smiled, as, having filled and lighted his pipe, he began carelessly to turn over the leaves of the book of poems they had discussed.

"Who knows?" he said, lightly. "Here's something Gordon says about such things: —

> "'I have changed the soil and the season,
> But whether skies freeze or flame,
> The soil they flame on, or freeze on,
> Is changed in little save name;
> The lodestone points to the nor'ward,
> The river runs to the sea;
> And you would have me look forward,
> And backward I fain would flee!'"

As he quoted these lines, the man from the South was standing looking out of the open window into

the starlit sky beyond. And at their end he laughed lightly as he said : —

" He wrote that in the Bush, you know, — the Bush he loved. And he would have fain fled backward. The lodestone pointed to the nor'ward. I say them here in the nor'ward, and I would as soon look forward as backward, but sooner nowhere at all." Again he laughed, and then, with a note of added bitterness in his voice, said : —

" To be sure I have n't a lodestone, unless it 's Lethe and the South. He had, and you know how they found him at last, on the grass, with his rifle — Ah, you know it ? Yes ; and I have n't a lodestone."

As the night wore on, Will, after his long day in Fleet Street, grew too tired to sit or stand, and so lay down on the couch he had extemporised for himself in one corner of the room. He had insisted from the first on Crossland's taking his bed.

After a while, everything in the little room became somewhat misty to Will. To the last, he could see the tall figure of his vagabond guest, standing framed in the open window. And whilst he was conscious of anything, he heard and understood, though vaguely, the man's strange talk ; as in weird and rough, but none the less beautiful language, he told of the great Bush of the far South. Then kind Nature asserted her motherly authority, and Will's tired eyelids closing, he sank into a deep sleep.

When Will woke, rather later in the morning than usual, he was alone in the little room. On his table

he found an envelope containing two pieces of paper. One was a cheque for £25. The other had written on it these words: —

"I am going, so write this to say, Good-bye; because I want to thank you for being kind to me. Do not think the cheque is intended as payment for your hospitality. It is not. It will be honoured if presented within three years, so may serve at some time to help you out of an awkward corner. I would make it more if I could — " Here followed an erasure of several words, and then: "Because you might as well have it as I. Good-bye! And don't work too hard — It 's not worth while."

This paper was signed, "Arthur Crawford," and underneath the signature were the words: "Wydah. New South Wales."

The cheque, Will noticed with some surprise, was signed, "Arthur Crossland."

About two months after the morning on which Will Darley read the note signed, "Arthur Crawford," a man climbed down from the box-seat of Cobb's Narrabri coach, as it stopped early in the Australian mid-summer evening, outside the Wydah hotel.

"May I be eternally jiggered, if it is n't old Crawford of Warroo Gully!" ejaculated a teamster who was standing on the hotel verandah at the time.

Two or three minutes elapsed, whilst the man who had dismounted from the coach peered anxiously

through the tall tree shadows in the direction from which the coach had arrived. Then Satan came loping wearily along the dusty road. The kangaroo dog was growing old, and on this summer's evening his black hide was fawn streaked with sweat-encrusted dust.

But the dog had still a few miles to travel that night. For its master, much to the disgust of the hotel-keeper, borrowed a horse from Jim Carberry the store-keeper, and, having "shouted" once for the occupants of the bar-room, started on his way to Warroo Gully.

The man's eyes sparkled, and his face lighted up, as he rode into the moonlight, followed by the tired-out dog.

"Good dog," he muttered. "Can't you smell it in the air? Only a mile or two more, Satan, and then — the gunyah!"

CHAPTER XXX

JOURNALIST AND HIS FRIEND

WILL DARLEY was alone again, and he recognised now that the coming, the staying, and the going, of the old vagabond who signed a cheque as Arthur Crossland, and a note as Arthur Crawford, together represented a distinct epoch in his life in Fleet Street.

His eyes were moist when he read the short, jerky sentences contained in that half sheet of note-paper. And the cheque he folded carefully in an envelope and put away with some letters he had received at Oxford from Trottie and from his friend Hinton. Then, in a shame-faced way, brushing a handkerchief over his eyes under pretence of blowing his nose, Will told himself that it was absurd for him to be seriously disturbed by the sudden disappearance of an erratic old Bohemian, into whose life scores of such episodes as his stay in that little room, had probably been crowded. Still, there was the cheque. And altogether Will felt very sad and lonely when he hurried out for his daily scramble in the rooting ground, on the morning of the departure of the man with the black dog.

Journalist and His Friend

Will's struggling life, since he had cut himself adrift from the wealth of his adopted father and the comfort of The Elms, had been a lonely one; and though from conviction he would probably have denied the assertion had he heard it made, yet he was of a sympathetic as well as of a very sensitive temperament. Men unfolded their troubles to Will, and in this way he was often very genuinely distressed. Also, to a responsive listener, Will could lay bare a good deal of himself. With natures like that of the younger of the Darley brothers, too, the rendering of services inspires some regard, if not affection, for the individual benefited. Will had seen enough of the reckless, half bitter, half sorrowful disposition of the beachcomber, to feel drawn by all in him that was Bohemian, or, in other words, by the force of three parts of his nature,— towards the strange personality of the man he had befriended. And without him Will felt lonely.

Almost immediately after the disappearance of his five days' guest, Will received news of another and forth-coming event which also promised to mark an epoch in his career. Word reached him from the sunny Canary Isles, that his friend Hinton was on the way to England, and would probably land at Southampton some two or three days after the arrival of his letter. This was certainly an event. And, regarding it as such, Will wrote to Trottie on the subject, and then prepared for a reckless plunge of extravagance in the shape of a trip down to Southampton to meet his friend.

Middle Greyness

Separations which cover any length of time have, when they occur at certain periods in the lives of those concerned, very peculiar effects. After the age of say thirty, a parting of five or even ten years duration frequently makes little or no difference, even of a temporary character, in the feelings of the individuals separated, when they again come together. The parting occurring before the age of twenty-five, a change is almost inevitable, though it is not necessarily one to be regretted, and probably will not be recognised until the subsequent coming together takes place. Up to this age, tastes, ideas, theories, and principles are growing and changing. If the individuals live together, the changes and growths in each, act and re-act imperceptibly on those of the other, and, coming gradually under the eyes of both, are unfelt and unrecognised.

When Will journeyed down to Southampton, he was not conscious of any great changes in his own mind and character. But the moment he came into contact with his friend he realised suddenly the changes which had come gradually over Hinton. His appearance was altered by the fact of his wearing a thick beard. The very colour of the man was changed to a rich brown; and hair which had been lank and straight had become curly. He was broader, stronger, more pronounced, and infinitely more independent in look, gesture, words, and tone than when Will had last seen him.

When they were in the train together, and speeding on towards London, Leonard Hinton said: —

Journalist and His Friend

"Well, and how are you getting on, old man, in the days of early journalism?"

It was in some way so totally different to what Will had pictured to himself in connection with this meeting. Hinton spoke as a wealthy publisher might in addressing a struggling author. Yet Will knew perfectly well that his friend had been actuated by the kindliest feelings, and spoke with every intention of being cordial. In the same way he, Will, had intended to be frank. But he was not. He had intended to unburthen a soul creased by Fleet Street. But he made no attempt to do so. And his reply was almost such as he might have made to James Cumming, — a deceitfully hopeful comment on the surface of things; one of the remarks which go to form the civilisation cloak we all wear, and which some of us doff less rarely than do others. Those who wear it most invariably are strictly good form. Those who frequently are found without it, are hardly respectable.

Hinton's main characteristics were really the same as those of the old days at Oxford. But their outward guise was entirely altered, and, in some ways, his mind had really changed. The man who sat chatting to Will in the train coming up from Southampton, was pre-eminently a successful journalist, and therein he differed largely from his friend. Travel had strengthened his mind, and contact with men and places had made his grasp of realities much greater than was Will's. But the essential difference between the two was, that Hinton's was the mind of the master

of detail,—the minutest fragments of a situation; whilst Will's was a window, through which he saw outlines, vague because of his want of scope, but whole outlines rather than vivid points.

Hinton was unable to obtain his old rooms in the Temple, and accepted Will's invitation to spend his first night in London at the little room under the roof of the house in Holborn.

"Ha! Old London, and new," said Will's friend, glancing from the picturesque and bulging gables of the quaint old houses opposite Gray's Inn Road, to the rigid, narrow-chested, and consumptive-looking building at the top of which Will lived. "The deterioration of art in the building trade. Speed and economy versus strength and picturesqueness. But I suppose you've done all that and deluged the front page of the 'Mercury' with it, eh?"

"No," said Will, "I cannot say I have touched upon that. You will open up new fields of copy to me, old man; and under your guidance, I shall amass huge wealth as a penny-a-liner. Yes, the stairs are a bit wearisome, but this is the last flight." Then, as they entered the modest little room, "And these are my chambers, Hinton. Smoking-room, there by the window; bed-room, behind the curtain; and sitting and dining room, combined for convenience' sake, you know, here in the centre."

Then the two men smoked and talked, and Will learned that such penny-a-lining as he did, was, except in the light of a pot-boiler pure and simple, a mistake.

Journalist and His Friend

"Anything that a crowd does is sure to be worth avoiding," said Hinton, in his slightly didactic and masterful way. "Stick to the outside staff of the 'Mercury,' for all you're worth; but never mind the reports of police cases, and proceedings in the Law Courts. News agencies can give everything wanted in that way. Everybody sees those things. You challenge competition with all London when you take in a paragraph about a police case. See the things other men do not see. Find out scraps of information about people and places which you have no business to know. The public love to read all that they have no right or reason to know anything about. So you rise above the crowd, and find openings where the crowd starves. Your material is everybody's, but you have seen it, and they have not; and putting it into an article, you make it something the agencies cannot touch, and the Fleet Street hack knows not of."

Hinton paused, and Will listened. And, in admiringly drinking in all this, he felt as though his friend were digging a gulf between them which seemed to widen with every sentence he uttered.

"Is that how you've managed, Hinton? Is that what you have been doing all this time?"

"Practically — on a larger scale you know, and in a bigger field. That is journalism really. Finding out the things others do not know, and putting them into readable form; and taking the things they do know, and dressing them so that they won't know

'em. But that is the treatment of chestnuts, and almost a science of itself."

"And what about elevating the public mind — leading opinion and instructing the people?" said Will, half jokingly.

"My dear fellow, that all belongs to past ages and — Tit-Bits. That is not journalism, now. The public mind does n't want elevating. It has no time. It wants amusing, interesting. Fiction writers and the public itself, lead opinions; and the board schools, and the rushing life the people lead, instruct them. Journalism has nothing to do with showing the world what may be learned from the life of a great man. It shows what brands of cigarettes he smokes, and how he folds his ties."

Will sighed a little wearily, and the two turned from the discussion of shop to the affairs of more immediate personal interest.

"But look here, old man," said Darley. "How does all this harmonise with your independence? How does it fit in with the desire to live that in you which is worth living; to produce whatever there is beautiful in you to give the world?"

"Ah, that sounds refreshingly like old days! And are you dreaming yet, Will? Well, penny-a-lining has not hurt you much at all events; or taught you much, I fancy, old chap. But you have an annuity or something to live on, have you not?"

"I have had nothing except what I 've earned during the last fifteen months."

"Well, of course, it's very nice to cherish those ideas; but I don't know really how a man can live without ambition, and I don't see how one can get along on those principles we used to preach at all. One must do something in which success is possible, and, unless one has genius, the world does not want one to leave beautiful things behind. It wants bright, curious little things to interest, as one goes along."

"But there must be ways of doing the other things," said Will, anxiously. "And if a man thinks he can do it, Leonard, he ought to."

"But the world will give a comfortable living and success for the one, and nothing for the other."

"But what does it matter what the world gives, so long as one can do the thing, achieve this end, and create something beautiful? If it cannot be done in journalism, there must be other ways, and — surely, that's the only life worth living."

"Well, that depends," said the man who had just come from the jungles and plains of South America. "If one has ambitions in journalism, then it does not matter. I have. And I like possibilities of success. Of course there are openings for the other sort of thing, — magazines, you know, and fiction; but they are not part of an active man's life in journalism, and take up too much time. However, we might talk all night like this; and I am awfully tired, old chap. Shall we go to bed now, and talk to-morrow?"

So Will Darley extemporised a couch, as he had done when the man from Warroo stayed with him;

and the two friends of Oxford days lay down to sleep.

"You know, Will," muttered Leonard Hinton, drowsily, "I am very much afraid these notions will cripple you fatally in newspaper work. I am very much afraid, Will, that there are tendencies which point rather to your being a sort of dreamer poet in embryo, than a coming journalist,—after all."

Will thought vaguely of the old vagabond who had stayed with him; pictured how scornfully he would have smiled at all this; and half hoped that Hinton's fear was not altogether a groundless one.

And so, both being tired, they dropped off to sleep, and dreamed dreams characteristic of their widely varying temperaments.

CHAPTER XXXI

GROWTH OF THE BLACK STREAK

When Robert Darley, with his friend Rollo Croft, left West Kensington for Paris, after the night of his "removal" from the House, one half of his nature was almost dead. But if one half were dead, the other was pulsating with hot life.

The dead half was that portion of his nature which had won for him success in what his ex-secretary called, "Middle greyness." It was the side of his character which in the Oxford days had made him subservient to wealth and power, as personified in James Cumming, at the cost of estrangement from his brother, — that strong, confident self of his, which had carried him through months of really hard work on the platform, and in the study of the house off Pall Mall.

The half that lived, and carried him in excited gaiety to Paris with Rollo Croft, was the half from which sprung the strange glitter, the hungry longing, which Croft had seen in his eyes and wondered at, on more than one occasion. The half which caused him, in the abandon of recklessness, to join his friend in drinking to "the most crucial point in his career," was the half out of which grew the savage desire for

a bound into excess, which, written clearly on his face before the break-down in his last speech in Parliament, had afterwards led the doctor who attended him to ask James Cumming if he knew of any insanity in the Darley family.

The ineffectual, convulsive efforts which the dying side of the man made to stem the current of his lapse into extremes would, to his ex-secretary, have appeared pitiable. By almost any one else who had seen them, they would have been pronounced contemptible. And, as a matter of fact, they were very sad, if only from their hopeless inadequacy and weakness.

The problem presented by Robert's condition at this period, was sufficiently beyond the comprehension of his friend Rollo Croft, to be a very simple matter to that gentleman. For him, extremes did not exist, and "middle greyness" had no meaning. He had never been short of money. He had never worked hard. He had never denied himself anything. His life was all on one plane, and that the refinement of artificial luxury. Consequently, Robert Darley's furious hunger for excess, and the effects on a nature like his of indulging that hunger, were things beyond the artist's ken. So it happened that Rollo Croft laughed lightly, and assisted his friend in the pursuit of all that glitters or is lurid.

For a month, the disgraced politician, and his friend who looked upon that disgrace as a joke, moved about the Continent together: Paris, Monte Carlo, Vienna, and Brussels; living a life so entirely artificial as to

leave no nook or cranny in Robert's mind open to the most casual thought of all he had left behind in England. Rollo Croft had left nothing that he could not pick up immediately on requiring it. And he lived in much the same way as he would have lived at West Kensington, save that this was a life of greater licence, and one, therefore, more pleasing to the man who thought things, "So absurd if one tries to take them seriously."

Then Robert was suddenly roused by discovering that he was without funds. This was unpleasant. And since, with charmingly graceful and vague indirectness, Mr. Rollo Croft made it quite clear that he could not afford to carry on the tour at his own expense, the two men returned to London.

Robert stepped out of his hansom outside the brownstone fronted house off Pall Mall, inert, shaky, and a mere ghost of the confident man who had angrily dismissed his secretary a couple of months before. His one languid desire was to get into the house, and leave Barlow to manage details and dismiss the cabman. Mechanically, he drew a bunch of keys from his pocket, and, applying one to the little American lock of the door, turned it and entered the hall. He then became aware that the house was empty, the hall containing not even a strip of carpet. Walking into a ground-floor room, he saw in the window a bill signifying that "This commodious family residence" was "to let."

Robert stood at the window, gazing in uncomfortable

indecision at the cab without. And as he stood there, the recollection flashed across his restless mind, of some two or three letters which, during the past month of feverish excess, he had opened and glanced at, but omitted to read. He remembered the odd moments at which these English letters had been handed him: when he was dressing in the evening, or taking his coffee in bed in the morning. He had glanced at the signatures: James Cumming, Will Darley, and others. But he had tossed them aside, and thought no more of them, in the whirl of changing lights and colour which that month had been to him. Now, the skin of his heavy looking face twitched, and his shoulders drooped in the weakness which was part purely natural and physical — the result of the past month — and part the mental triumph of the black streak over the surface strength of education and attainments.

"Where the devil am I to go?" he muttered, as he stood looking at the waiting cab.

The discomfort of that bare and empty room oppressed him, and so, walking outside and stepping into the cab once more, he drove to his club and engaged a room there. He then proceeded citywards, and called at his bank, from which institution he had received notice, when in Monte Carlo, that his account was on the verge of being over-drawn. He enquired, somewhat anxiously, whether the usual monthly payment had been made by Mr. Cumming's bankers. He was informed that no remittance had been received that month, but that instructions had, to the effect that

the previously arranged authority for over-draft was cancelled.

So Robert, feeling more uneasy than he had felt after his last appearance in Parliament, walked out of the bank and drove to Waterloo. Then he took train down to Teddington. He found The Elms in the hands of a care-taker and one or two servants, who eyed him curiously as he enquired when Mr. Cumming had left and for where. He was told that the household had moved to Bramwood, as usual, for the late autumn and winter. So he travelled back to town, feeling more disconsolate than before.

After his mode of life on the Continent, the evening was a stimulant to Robert; and, having dressed at his club, he drove to West Kensington, telling himself that it would be pleasant to dine again with Bèté, and probably with Rollo Croft. No friendly greeting, with the old atmosphere of soft lights and bright hangings, awaited him in Kensington, however; for he learned that Rollo Croft had proceeded that afternoon to Scarborough, in answer to a telegram received from Bèté. And: "No, sir; there was no message left for Mr. Darley."

Robert, therefore, was forced to dine alone, which, in his then frame of mind, was unfortunate. For, there being no glamour of bright conversation to blend with it, the mere crude material of dinner, and all that followed later, had to be relied on for stimulus. One of the results of this was that the painfully obvious efforts not to catch his eye, made by several men at the club, depressed and jarred on Robert in his lone-

liness to an extraordinary extent. Another result was, that when, at ten o'clock next morning, he woke, after some four hours of heavy sleep, he felt really ill. His lips were grey and tremulous, and the dark hollows under his eyes showed very clearly the strain of the last month, — the effect of unrelieved extremes.

Robert left the club before noon for Hampshire; and late in the autumn afternoon he drove in a fly, hired at Bramwood station, up the magnificent chestnut avenue of the Grange. By his own request, Robert was shown into a small morning-room, and not into the drawing-room, where at that time he knew tea was being served. Learning that James Cumming was visiting a house in the district, and was not expected at the Grange till shortly before dinner that night, Robert asked to see the rich man's daughter.

Two letters from faithful tender Trottie had been amongst those Robert had tossed aside unread during his stay on the Continent. It was not unnatural, therefore, that a slight note of womanly reserve should have been mingled with the sisterly sympathy and sadness of Trottie's tone, as she greeted the man who had fallen.

"Trottie, is your father very angry?" were the first words this haggard-looking man spoke, as his hot hand touched the girl's dainty fingers.

"I am afraid he is, Robert. He thought you ought to have told him all about it at first; and now, since you refused to answer his letters, he says he will never see you again. He went up to London only yester-

day to see about transferring an annuity, or something like that, to you. Miss Lipston knows what it was."

"But, Trottie," broke in Robert; and the touch of his dry fingers, as he placed them tremblingly on her arm, made Trottie shiver. She was full of pity and the desire to help Robert in his weakness. But as she looked at the grey, shaking lips and blurred features of the man before her, Trottie realised that this pity of hers was very far removed from that said to be akin to love.

"But, Trottie, don't you think something can be done? Don't you think he can be smoothed over somehow? I know it was rude of me not to answer his letters, or tell him anything; but — Trottie, I must have some means of living. He cannot turn round after all these years, and — leave me stranded!"

The man's unconscious humiliation was deplorable, and caused Trottie's lissom figure to be involuntarily straightened and drawn slightly away from Robert.

"Can you not do something yourself, Robert? Would it not be better to let Father see you were prepared to start again, to help yourself in some way?"

Robert moved one hand in nervous impatience. "I cannot start work, Trottie, after the life I have led. At least, whatever I do, I must have money to live on. I cannot — you would n't expect me to follow in Will's wake, and go into Fleet Street."

Trottie's eyes flashed loyalty. "I should not think it a bad example to follow," she said, quickly, lower-

ing her voice then, and adding: "But of course I don't know; I only want to see what is best for you. What has the last month been for you, Robert?"

The man smiled weakly, and then said, with some hesitation: "Oh, a month of forgetting, Trottie, — a month of living, after all the grind of the other part. But tell me, do you really mean that your father does not — will not, see me?"

"I hardly know," rejoined the girl, sadly. "I am afraid he will not, now, at all events. But I expect he will be in directly, so you will be able to judge. I am very, very sorry, Robert; but — Oh, Robert, won't you remember the old days on the river, and start again without — And show every one that the dreadful things the papers have said about you are not true? They are not, are they, Robert?"

Trottie's cousin looked half nervously at her. "Nothing that appears in papers is ever — Hullo! This must be your father, Trottie." Robert heard James Cumming's footsteps in the hall. "Now, Trottie," he continued, "go, like the kind little sister you always were, and try to smooth things over. Tell him — Oh, promise anything, Trottie; but, for goodness' sake, pave the way somehow!"

Trottie could not smile; but she bowed her head as she turned from her cousin, and left the room. Her trusting nature made her quite forgetful of the fact that Robert had not even shown her the courtesy of mentioning her unanswered letters. But the humiliation, the degradation into weakness which lacked all

trace of pride, shown in her cousin's appeal, was a very painful shock to her, and caused a wave of revulsion to pass over a heart anxious to feel only sisterly love.

"You would not have me follow in Will's wake, and go into Fleet Street?" That one sentence of Robert's would keep rising in her mind; and, strive as she might to make excuses to herself for the man she had just left, there was yet a distinct feeling of contempt in her mind as she stepped up to her father in the hall, and began to tell him of her cousin's return.

James Cumming cut short the conciliatory remarks of his daughter by saying sharply, "Where is he?"

Two minutes afterwards, the rich man, angry in his weak intolerance of all that did not meet his views, had entered the room where, waiting in nervous anxiety, his adopted son stood, resting one shaky hand on the table. His greeting of Robert was not calculated to lessen the tension of the atmosphere of that bright little morning-room.

"So you have returned to your own country, and come to my house," was what he said. And Robert cleared his throat nervously, before saying, in reply:

"Yes. And I must ask you to forgive my rudeness in not writing. The strain of that last week in the House was too much for me, I think; and I have paid no attention to anything since. I came back to town yesterday, and went straight to The Elms to see you. I was surprised to find — to find that my account at the Union and Provincial was exhausted. They

told me nothing was paid in last month; and I — I am in actual want of money for immediate expenses."

"Oh, you are in want of money," repeated James Cumming. "And who do you think is to supply you with money, pray? You surely don't expect it from me, after all that has happened, do you? You don't imagine I shall supply you with the means of disgracing yourself any farther?"

"I must have something to live on," said the younger man. "I am evidently not cut out for the grind of political work; but — you would not have me starve."

It was very curious, this utter prostration of weakness which introduced so helpless a tone into all Robert said, and seemed to have produced in him an almost childish feeling of irresponsibility, and claim for support as something which must of course be given him. For a full month, Robert had been the creature in every fibre of his body, in every breath he drew, of the black streak which ran like the trail of a snake through his nature. The brilliant plausibility — itself the child of his weakness — which had for so long hidden the underlying black strain, that was the dominant feature of the man, had now vanished utterly, leaving in its place only bare weakness, pitiable in its helplessness, contemptible in its unashamed nakedness.

James Cumming was not a man who studied motives or causes. He saw only results. And in this case the results he saw made him angry. He looked

at this shaking, bleared-faced son of his adoption, to whom he had given all that wealth and influence can give to ensure success in a young man; and he saw nothing but complete and humiliating failure. It made his blood tingle through his veins, in the hot anger of exasperation and of pride brought low.

"You say you must have something to live on," he said, beating time to his words with one white hand. "That does not seem so necessary to me. But, look here, Robert Darley! You have no more claim on me than I have on the Chancellor of England. Not so much, for you owe me for all you ever had. There was an annuity left you under your mother's will, which amounts now to about two hundred pounds a year. I have made that payable at your bank. And as far as any other single penny is concerned, you need never look to me. Do you understand? I have spent thousands in putting you in the position you held last month, and you choose — Bah! You choose to disgrace yourself. Very well. Lead your own life and disgrace yourself in your own way; but not at my expense, not under my roof; you follow me? That is all I have to say, and I wish to hear — nothing."

The rich man's large hand was waved as though to sweep away Robert's unspoken appeal. He rose and swung open the door of the room.

"You don't mean that you want me to leave your house?" said Robert.

"My house is no place for you, Robert Darley;

or for any man who chooses your life. And — I do not want you here."

Trottie was in the deep old porch at the front entrance, as Robert passed out, after a carriage had been ordered for him.

"Good-bye, Robert!" she said, holding out her two hands in womanly sympathy to the man she could not help despising.

"Good-bye, Trottie! Good-bye!" said Robert Darley, as he fumbled with the handle of the carriage-door. "Confound the thing! There! Good-bye, Trottie! For goodness' sake try to bring your father round, and gloss things over somehow!"

CHAPTER XXXII

AN IDEA

LEONARD HINTON, being a successful journalist, could not spend very much time in foregathering with his Oxford chum, Will Darley. He found himself rather the man of the hour in the office of his paper. He even received a command-invitation to lunch with the editor; a man noted for never having written a sentence which did not express at least two views of the subject he treated. Yet Hinton was not one who dropped old friends; and the conversation he had with Will on the night of his arrival in London was the first of several night talks in the rooms he obtained in one of the Temple Inns, and in Will's more humble quarters near the sky above Holborn. There was this between them, however: Leonard Hinton had discovered his *métier*, found his niche in the world; Will Darley had not.

The world of journalism; its rush of instant publicity to matter three-hours old; the very smell of its proof-sheets; the atmosphere of its hurried births in the small hours of each succeeding day, — all this had become Hinton's world, and his head and heart and soul were in it. It was champagne to Hinton to

listen, in a railway carriage, to men commenting on an article of his. And the great office in Fleet Street, with its innumerable rooms from which emanated all the infinite varieties of matter which the public scan through in the big dailies; this place was more than any home could be, to Will's Oxford friend.

And Will Darley rooted and scrambled in Fleet Street because he wanted food.

The difference was that which lies between men whose occupation is the great pleasure of their lives, and men whose only pleasures come in hours not devoted to their occupation.

For a considerable time past, Will Darley had felt isolated, and his loneliness had depressed and oppressed him. He had looked forward, almost with longing, to the return of his friend from South America, because he felt that at all events there was this one man in the world to whom he could lay himself bare. Will's inmost self was still his own, and he had been prepared to show it to his friend. His friend had found a hole in the earth's surface in which to place his inmost self, making of it the foundation of his life's structure. So these two did not pierce the "fine flesh stuff" in their talks. And Will felt more lonely than ever.

When Will talked to his friend in the long winter nights that followed the latter's arrival in England, he felt grateful for the hints and advice given by Hinton, in his vigorous way, and more than half ashamed of himself because of his inability to really fraternise

with the man who had at one time had all his confidence. He felt that he had been closer to the old vagabond who for five days had shared his room, than he was now to the friend he had almost loved in the Oxford days.

"Look here, Will," Hinton would say, after talk of Will's immediate prospects in Fleet Street. "Write an article on that queer old tavern we went into the other day, and send it in to the 'Herald.' I'll see that the editor reads it. Hang it! Sit down now, old man, and begin the thing. Say something about the *habitués* of the place, and work in some of that quaint, indefinite style of yours. Make something out of that awful old chap with the green spectacles."

And Will would sometimes laugh, and pass the matter off in conversation. And sometimes he would write the article as Hinton directed. Though he did not particularly notice the fact, yet the articles he wrote in that way were generally those he afterwards had the pleasure of correcting in the proof, and receiving a cheque for. And at times these things made him hopeful, so that he told himself he was gaining ground, and would sooner or later win a position in which he could make something worth giving to the world. But on most evenings, he returned to his room above Holborn, after the day's work in Fleet Street, weary and depressed, with a sense of yearning and disappointment which, whilst not actually disgust with himself, was something like disgust with all that he did.

Middle Greyness

His mind was in chaos at this period, and his hopes and desires so conflicting and varying, that sometimes, in the hush of the early morning, when he sat at the open window of the little room near the sky, he would rest his head wearily on his two hands, and tell himself, with a sigh, that the veil would never be lifted; that this aching emptiness and sand-sifting was all the life he would ever know. Then he would think vaguely of Trottie, and all that represented the one tender spot in his life. He wondered if Trottie would care, if Trottie would understand and sympathise with these longings of his which seemed so to isolate him, that, in the middle of the scramble of London's newspaper world, he felt, as a sharp pain sometimes, all the complete loneliness of a night ride across the plains in California. And what had he to show Trottie, — he would ask himself. There was the bitterness of having achieved nothing. And after that, long hours of weariness would come.

It was six months after Hinton's return to England, and London, towards the end of a fine spring, was looking its best and brightest. Waking somewhat earlier than usual one morning, Will Darley found his mind filled to overflowing by one definite Idea. He munched abstractedly at two or three biscuits while dressing, and then, without waiting to boil coffee and prepare breakfast, as his custom was, he hurried down five flights of stairs and out into the bright morning sunlight which flooded all London. Starting off at a swinging pace, he relapsed, after a few

moments, into his usual slow walk, and paused doubtingly, when half-way down Chancery Lane, to look at his watch and to pare his finger-nails. Turning then into one of the Inns of Court, he proceeded to Leonard Hinton's chambers, and ruthlessly aroused the journalist from his morning sleep.

"What 's the matter now?" said Hinton, drowsily raising himself on one elbow and staring at his friend. "Hi, hang it! Don't sit down on that waistcoat; my watch is in that. And don't take that other chair, because there 's copy on it. Here, sit on the bed, if you must sit down. Have you got a leader-writer's berth on the 'Times,' or are the Law Courts on fire? In either case — you are the most awkward man in London, Darley, bar nothing. Can't you feel that you are sitting on my shins? There, that 's all right. Now don't make a fuss!"

"An Idea has occurred to me," began Darley.

"Well, why on earth did n't you write it down, man, before coming to sit on my legs in the middle of the night and talk about it?"

"But this is not an Idea for an article. It 's nothing very much after all to any one but me; and — I 'm sorry I woke you, old man."

The man in the bed grunted cordial assent to the last part of this remark. Then Will went on to say, hesitatingly, and as though telling in confidence of a love affair, "Well, you know, Hinton, I have been rather out of sorts with myself of late. Of course I have not tried the flavour of success as you

have; but even remembering all that, I don't seem able to work up any love like yours for newspaper work. As a matter of fact" — Will's tone suggested nothing less than a confession of pocket-picking — "I think I almost loathe it; and — I 've not been getting any satisfaction out of my life at all."

Will sighed; and Hinton's eyes opened widely as he said: "I see! And you have made up your mind to return to the purple and fine linen of The Elms. Well, I don't know but what — "

"My dear fellow, what on earth are you talking about? You might know me better than to think I should ever do that."

"I withdraw, I withdraw abjectly," said the man under the bed-clothes. "But why the deuce don't you come to the point, and show a man what you are driving at?"

Will gazed mildly and seriously at his friend. He was so rich in the possession of his Idea. "Well, I have made up my mind to go away, that 's all," he said, slowly. "I want to move and see things. Then I shall be able to do something; to make something."

Will's eyes were staring dreamily through the wall of his friend's room, when Hinton sat up in bed, in order that he might chuckle with more freedom.

"Oh, I see, you are going to travel! Very good idea, very good indeed; and I should say pleasanter than penny-a-lining. You intend to be away for some time, I suppose; and — who has left you the fortune?"

An Idea

Will was too wealthy in the holding of his Idea to be angry; but his friend's bantering tone jarred upon him just then, and seemed to remind him of all the loneliness of his life, which the new thoughts of that morning had made him forget. He had been rather prepared for confidences; but his mind's screen shut now with a snap, and Fleet Street was in his voice as he said: —

"Nonsense, Leonard; I don't want a fortune. I've no idea of taking a yachting cruise, — more likely of travelling in an emigrant ship. No. I know Oxford; I know the river; and I've seen a little of Fleet Street. Well, now I want to have a look at some other part of the world. I want to see some other people, and know how men feel outside this dear old over-crowded country. That is all. Then I shall come back and do something worth doing for its own sake; or else — or else I shall stop away."

"H'm!" Hinton delivered himself of the inarticulate and quite unspellable sound which signifies mental reception — understanding. "Are you — er — Shall you leave this morning?"

Will's sense of humour was swamped in the pride of possession of his Idea. "No, not to-day," he said. "In two or three days — a week perhaps."

"Ah! Well, you'll look in in passing, and say good-bye, won't you, old man?"

"Yes," said Will, busy with the tracing of geometrical designs on the counterpane of his friend's bed.

"Yes, of course I shall see you. You — you are joking, I believe, Hinton; and you want to go to sleep. Well, forgive me for disturbing you, old man. I'll get away."

And Will moved towards the door, as Hinton lowered himself luxuriously under the bed-clothes.

"Look here, joking aside," said the journalist; "I don't quite understand this notion of yours; but I expect I shall see you this evening, and there's plenty of time to talk it over, is there not?"

"Oh, yes," said Will, turning the handle of the door as he spoke. "Yes, I suppose there's plenty of time."

And then he walked slowly out and down the narrow old staircase into the Temple Gardens.

CHAPTER XXXIII

A PICTURE

WILL DARLEY walked quietly down the Strand after leaving his friend's chambers in the Temple. He observed that the sunshine of a bright May morning is very beautiful, even in a London street.

There is a railway booking-office in the Strand, just before one comes to the Church of St. Clements Danes, and Will paused when passing that office to watch the acrobatic antics of an urchin who was trying to reach one of the yellow handbills hanging in the doorway. The urchin was not tall enough to reach the bills in question, so Will stepped forward and tore one down for him. In doing so he noticed the words, Bushey Park, in bold, black lettering on the yellow paper.

"Yes," he muttered, after pondering a moment or so with a bill in his hand. "Yes, I will go and have a look at the elm avenue."

Then he walked over Waterloo bridge, from which he could see the sunlight dancing all across the river, and took train for Teddington.

When Will had last seen Bushey Park its trees had been black and its grass sparkling with hoar frost.

Middle Greyness

On this occasion, the great kindly chestnuts seemed to be doubled in size, so heavy and luxuriant was the weight of foliage they stretched towards the road on one side, to their nodding neighbours on the other. Tender and fairy-like were the tall elms that line the outer avenues, and softly they rustled their burdens of young leaves, through which the sunlight fell in chequered splashes onto new-born grass below. The dainty freshness of it all fascinated Will, as he walked slowly along, treading softly whilst passing a group of young deer, in instinctive dread of there being laid to his door the sin of having disturbed anything that breathed in this idyllic boudoir of the year's girlhood.

"I wonder," he murmured to himself, "if I shall see Trottie here. I think I would rather not — to-day."

Then, reaching a little slope beyond the outer line of elms, he lay down in the soft grass, and began to think.

The habit of thinking aloud had grown upon Will, as it does upon men who live alone, or who, by force of circumstance, are lonely; and, as he lay on the grass slope beyond the elm-trees, he muttered and murmured to himself of all the many things which had occupied his mind that morning.

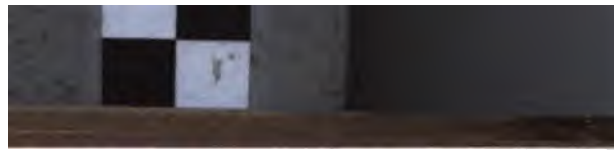
"There 's the question of money," he said between puffs from his favourite briar. "It is a blessing this Idea did not come to me twelve months ago, or I should have gone crazy for want of funds to carry it

out. As it is, I know I 've saved something this year, — not much, it 's true, but something. And then, the half year of my annuity was payable last month. I have n't touched that yet, and it will carry me a good way. I 'll earn something when I am moving, too. Oh, yes, I shall manage all right. I must see Trottie somehow before I go, and — say good-bye. Yes — I will say good-bye to Trottie; and I wonder — By Jove, I wonder where I shall go!"

Then Will stopped thinking aloud, and began to think harder than before, and to himself. He thought of Hinton's matter-of-fact remarks and powerfully graphic writings, about life in South America. But that did not appeal very strongly to him. He thought of the vast stretches of unknown country in the Dark Continent, and his eyes grew brighter. He pictured himself riding in the early morning across a stretch of rolling prairie in California, where the eye saw nothing but a vast expanse of undulating sage brush. That touched a strongly sympathetic chord, and Will dwelt upon the picture with some enthusiasm in his face.

Suddenly, then, there flashed across his mind a picture so totally different, and one which yet appealed so strongly to the phase of feeling through which he was passing; that he sat up on his green slope, and, gazing fixedly between the gnarled trunks of the elm-trees, seemed actually to see and feel all that the flash of recollection brought to his mind.

The frame of the picture he saw was the window



of his little room above Holborn; its background was a starlit sky, and in its foreground he saw a plain deal table, with copy paper and pens littered about one end of it, and the remains of a simple supper over the other. But the picture was not a study of still life, — no mere "interior." The central figure was that of a tall man whose shoulders, though broad and strong, were slightly bent. The man's hair was grey and unkempt-looking; his beard, of the same colour, was shaggy and uneven; his eyes were glowing and deep-set; his face thin, with a look of nervous relaxation in it; his clothes, hanging loosely upon him, gave to his figure an uncared-for appearance. One of the man's bony hands rested on the window-sash which formed the frame of Will Darley's picture, and the other was held elbow-high, as in gesticulation.

Will sat staring at the picture of his reminiscent fancy; and as he gazed — recollection growing upon him — he seemed to hear the central figure speaking in a low, strong voice, which hoarseness made a little harsh.

"And if ever you drift far enough South to be near that Bush in the colony people know as New South Wales, find a township called Wydah, and ask if old Crawford, of Warroo Gully, is still in existence. If they tell you, 'No, he is dead,' then pass on, and forget. But if they say he is at his old place in the gunyah on the way to Warroo Hills, then borrow a horse and ask of some one the way to that gunyah. In the evening,

A Picture

saddle your horse and start off down the Narrabri road, just as you see a blue haze beginning to rise between the gum-trees. That is Nature's veil with which she hides night's birth from eyes that pry. Then — and you must be very sure you know your way — you will see young night in the Bush as you ride from the Narrabri road to the humpy beyond the gully. You will hear Ishmael's sad defiance in the howling of dingoes on the hillsides; and drear monotony in the mopoke's queer talk from the trees overhead. You will feel — ay, and hear — at intervals, the nothingness, the beautiful stillness, of the Bush; and again you will hear sounds like the rustling of garments, — the garments of the dead; Nature's ghosts in tens of thousands whispering to you in the moonlight. You will listen with ears and eyes wide open, and, on the rising rocky ground that shows between tall tree-trunks, you will see huge, shapeless shadows flitting to and fro in endless, aimless weirdness, like spirits of half-formed creations thrown aside in the world's first workshop. The coarse grass will quiver close under your horse's nose, and long, snaky forms will glide through it and scuttle on short, finny feet up two hundred feet of grey timber. Then you will shiver, and, raising your head, you will see perched on the dead, broken limb of a tree, clear-cut in moonlit space, a big-headed, unearthly-looking bird, with its long beak open. As though mocking at your shiver, a laugh that sounds like a lost soul's jeer at humanity's sufferings, will issue from the tree with the dead limb;

and you will spur your horse till he shies from fright, as a possum overhead, with a dry cough of cussedness, drops a broken twig on his head. Then there will come a hush, — a stillness so complete that your horse will prick its ears in wonder, and its heart-beating will sound to you like the throb of a steamer's screw. You will wonder at the depth of this silence. And, while you wonder, a patch from top of a black-butt-tree will move bodily into mid-air, and a flock of thirty screeching cockatoos, whose cries are like the screams Dantè dreamed of, will sweep across the sky over your head, and leave you, marvelling still, but at the noise. You will hear the sad talk of dead bark, and see the ragged outlines of crippled vegetation. You will breathe the faintness of decayed gum-leaves, and bathe your eyes in the mellow fragrance of moonlight you can feel trickling through your brain as you ride. You will see, and hear, and feel, and do these and many other things; and, by the time you reach the gunyah, you will have begun to understand a little of it, and to love the beauty and the weirdness of all this — which is the Bush."

When he reached this point, the man in Will's picture paused, and lowered the hand which rested on the window-sash, — the picture's frame. Then he laughed, and the dog by his side whined, as, continuing, the man said: —

"Then you will find me, and we will sit out in the moonlight and laugh at it, with Satan."

Slowly Will rose to his feet from the grass, and

walked in the spring afternoon's clear sunlight, towards the elm avenue.

A lark, floating in overhead sky-depths of liquid, cloudless blue, was pouring out its trusting soul in sweet and throbbing melody; and, far away, near the end of the first avenue, Will heard faintly the laughter of three children playing with a dog.

"How queer," he muttered, as he took from his lips the pipe which for an hour and more had been empty. "I shall go to Australia, of course; and — if I should happen to find the old man, why — I can thank him for his cheque."

CHAPTER XXXIV

"GOOD-BYE, TROTTIE!"

WILL had never told his friend Hinton of the old man with the dog called Satan, who had stayed with him for five days. In his heart, he felt vaguely half ashamed; it seemed so like disloyalty, that this old vagabond had touched a deeper chord in him, and appealed more strongly to all the desires of his inner nature, than had his friend of Oxford days. So now Will said nothing of the sudden wave of recollection which had given him in Bushey Park his decision as to where he should go. He simply told Hinton that he was going to Australia. And Hinton, who looked upon this phase in his friend as sheer midsummer madness, thought it as well, or as bad, that he should go to the Antipodes as to any other part of the world.

Will collected the few debts which Fleet Street owed him, drew out all the money due from the solicitors who had the management of his annuity, and in a couple of days had completed such preparations as were necessary for him to make before leaving England for the far South. Then, having written to tell his cousin of his intention, he bought a

big bunch of white and yellow roses in Covent Garden one morning, and, carrying these, like a rustic lover going wooing, he went to see James Cumming's daughter Trottie.

Trottie, sweet and dainty as a white violet, in her summer gown and big straw hat, was sitting waiting in the Fairie, under the willows, when Will arrived with his roses. He had entered the garden of The Elms by the little side gate at the end of the lane outside, as he had said in his letter that he would. Trottie had mentioned to her father at breakfast that morning, that Will was coming down to go on the river with her, and James Cumming had nodded over the top of his paper; whilst Miss Lipston, with a kind look on her prim face, had given minute instructions for the preparation of a lunch-basket. Will had always been a favourite with Trottie's one-time governess.

" I am so glad you have come early, Will," said Trottie, frankly, holding out her hand as Will stepped into the boat. " And, oh, you dear boy, what lovely roses ! Fancy you bringing these from smoky old London. It was good of you, Will."

Then as the Fairie glided out into the sunlight beyond the willows, and Will settled down to work at the sculls, Trottie added: " It 's going to be a perfect day, Will; and I shall make you take me ever so far up the river, and tell me everything about Fleet Street, and this mysterious idea of yours."

So they talked, and drank in the beauty of the May morning, as Will pulled quietly up-stream. He told Trottie of his uncertainties and disappointments of the past year, and of how his Idea had come to him in the early morning only a few days before; how sure he was that this was the right thing to do; and how hopeful he felt now he had made ready to work out his plan.

"I 've been thinking and puzzling, and working too, Trottie, all this time," he said, resting on his sculls, as he leaned towards the girl in the stern of the Fairie. "But I 've had no ground to work on. It has been all thoughts, Trottie. Now, I am going away to see other things, and other places, so that I may know them. I want to put my fingers on the raw life of the world, Trottie, to feel it throbbing, and know what men and women, moving about in the places outside, really are. Then I — then I hope I shall do something, make something. Are you glad, Trottie? Do you think it wise?"

Trottie thought how like the question was to that which Will had asked her on the afternoon of the day on which he had left The Elms for Fleet Street; and she answered as seriously as she had answered then.

"Yes, I am glad, Will. I think it is wise; and — Oh, I am certain you will find all this that you want so."

Will looked his thanks for the girl's sympathy, and they were silent for a time. Trottie had looked sad when Will had first spoken of his Idea, and told

her that he meant to go away, but the light that shone in his eyes when he explained to her how and why he had made up his mind to go, and all he hoped to win by going, — this touched the artist, appealed to all the poetry in her beauty loving nature; and her own eyes reflected Will's enthusiasm as she told him she was "glad."

Once during the long afternoon which followed lunch under the willows of the Sunbury back-water, their conversation turned in the direction of Robert and his affairs; and Trottie told, with sad seriousness, of how the older brother had left the Grange. Will sighed, the more regretfully because he had since heard indirectly of a life his brother was leading, of which he could say little or nothing to the innocent girl who sat facing him. Instinctively, they touched only briefly on this topic, Will being anxious to make the most of this last day with his cousin, and Trottie, in the kindness of her heart, wishing to make it a bright memory to Will.

At last the sunshine began to mellow, and the sky in the west to redden and darken, with ever-changing, always beautiful richness of colour, as the afternoon gave place to early evening. Will had grown anxious and nervous as the boat neared the lawn of The Elms, and Trottie's eyes gave her heart's denial to the brave little smile that flickered on her lips.

Will pulled his sculls in, and allowed the Fairie to drift alongside the boat-house. The beautiful hush of evening on the river seemed to have spread itself

soothingly over everything, and the two sat still in the boat, where it lay below the sloping lawn. Will made no pretence of light-heartedness now, as he said: —

"I must go now. I must say good-bye, and go back into the other world."

His voice was not very firm; and Trottie felt the strength of her heart trickling out with every word she spoke, as, half laughingly, she reminded Will of their little adventure at the weir, when he had brought her home in the Fairie on an evening several years before.

"Trottie, dear," said Will, nervously touching, as he spoke, the little hand which hung over the side of the boat.

"I am Charlotte, now, Will, to everybody. Father says Trottie is absurd at my mature age."

It was such a trembling little laugh that came with the words that Will rose quickly in his seat as though he would have come to her side. He paused, however, and stood instead with one hand resting on the post at which the Fairie was generally moored.

"You are Charlotte to everybody," he said slowly. "Well, I must go." Will held out his hand. But he did not allow his eyes to meet those of the girl. "Dear little Trottie!" he said, suddenly bending towards her, and lightly touching her shoulder with one hand, "you won't forget all about me when I go to the other side of the world? You will remember, and — and be glad to hear what I have to tell of

when I come back ? Good-bye ! Promise me you will never be Charlotte, but always dear little Trottie, to me. Will you ? "

" I shall always be the same to you," said Trottie, slowly, as, rising from her seat among the cushions, she stretched out her hand to her cousin. " Yes ; I shall always be Trottie, to you, Will. Good-bye ! "

Then they parted, and, having previously explained that he would not come up to the house with his cousin, Will walked slowly across the lawn and out by the wicker gate, on his way to London and—to Australia.

CHAPTER XXXV

THIS CANNOT BE ALL

Two days after James Cumming's daughter had seen Will Darley walk away from the boat-house beside which he had stood in wishing her good-bye, Rollo Croft paid an afternoon call at The Elms. Mr. Cumming was in town on the occasion of this visit; and, during the few minutes which elapsed before Miss Lipston entered the drawing-room, Trottie and the artist were alone.

When she first came into the room to meet him, Rollo Croft presented Trottie with a bunch of very beautiful white and yellow roses. Hours afterwards, when the artist had returned to town, and James Cumming and his daughter were at dinner, a servant, coming into the drawing-room with lights, found the great, fragrant flowers lying loosely in a heap on the floor, beside a little table.

On another little table, in a daintily furnished bedroom upstairs, a smaller bunch of white and yellow roses had stood for two days, carefully arranged in water, that the sweet life in them might be prolonged whilst tender care could make it last.

On the evening of that day Rollo Croft, arriving at his house in West Kensington, sent for his factotum, who was a sort of superior Barlow, an *edition de luxe* of that model servant.

"Who called this afternoon, Norton?" asked the apostle of the "caviarre."

"Mademoiselle was here at four, sir, driving the ponies; Mr. Arnold came directly after you left; two other gentlemen left cards; and Mr. Robert Darley called shortly before five."

One gathered from the man's tone that he could have described accurately the clothing worn by each visitor, had such description been desired. The artist looked thoughtfully at his confidential servant for a moment, and then said: —

"I want you to arrange, Norton, — let there be no mistake about this, please, — that when Mr. Robert Darley calls again, I am not at home. I am — out of town, and you cannot say when I shall return. See to this yourself, Norton, and don't let there be any awkwardness in the way it is done."

On the morning of the day of Rollo Croft's call at The Elms, Hinton, the journalist, said good-bye to his friend Will Darley, on the deck of an outward-bound Australian packet lying at Tilbury.

The forty-odd days occupied by the ship in which Will travelled in reaching Melbourne were perhaps the most interesting days he had lived through up to that period. At first, a dreamer and a student; then, one of the crowd which sways to and fro, year in and

year out, from Temple Bar to Ludgate Hill, Will Darley had left England to study realities, types, men, and manners, and, as he said, "to feel raw humanity."

When, lounging in the sunshine on the deck of the "Orivada," he congratulated himself on the success of his first step, and the richness of the field of observation to which it had introduced him, he added, as a further ground for satisfaction: —

"And, of course, I have not really begun yet. This is only the preliminary step, the getting there, the journey to the goal. And, the journey teaching me so much, showing me so much that I want to see, and bringing me into contact with so many men and women who belong to types all unknown to me, surely the goal itself must bring great things."

The deduction certainly had a plausible ring about it; and, in any case, for the present there was nothing to make Will regret the step he had taken, since, as he told a fellow-passenger with whom he had become friendly, "I am simply drinking in character sketches all day long."

In regarding this voyage simply as a preliminary, however, — a means to an end, — Will's want of knowledge of the world made him overlook one feature of the situation which he afterwards learned to clearly recognise. In all the world, including the mines of wealth which are represented by continental railway trains, Colonial newspaper offices, the "sailor town" of Eastern ports, South African mining camps, Indian Rest Houses, and "Hotels"

in the beef districts of the far West, — including all these highways of drifting humanity, there are very few points of observation known to Cosmopolitanism, which form such perfect watch-towers from which to study " raw humanity " as the decks and cabins of an ocean-going steamer.

The extraordinary facilities which make it possible for one to become really intimately known to, and friendly with, half-a-dozen men and women in three days; the circumstances under which grown men gambol about like children; the atmosphere which leads women to carry their hearts about on cushions in the moonlight, and young men to lay bare their inmost souls to friends of an evening promenade's acquaintance, — these are features which make each day of an ocean voyage an absorbingly interesting little drama, to the man who travels with ears and eyes open, and a waking brain.

Then again, one finds people who are in themselves and under any circumstances interesting, amongst those who for a month or six weeks at a time form the population of a passenger-ship's little world. Men whose leave-taking of home and friends causes the forfeiture of a few thousands in the shape of bail; younger and older sons who have developed idiosyncrasies; ladies whose husbands are conspicuously absent from among those who " see them off; " the man who from end to end of the voyage is a mystery, and the one woman who understands him; the all-pervading globe-trotter, and the equally universal but infinitely superior

vagabond drifter about the earth's surface, — these, with a sub-stratum of good, average, companionable people, two or three brides-to-be, and the usual sprinkling of bores, bears, and cads, are all amongst ordinary types of a ship's population, and, stirred up in an atmosphere of salt-water Bohemianism, form a pleasing study.

Will Darley studied them, charmed by the promise he saw in this preliminary to the fingering of raw life. Then came Port Phillip Heads, and the packing of baggage, the "Good-byes" to friends of close touch, and the berthing at Williamstown wharf, finally — Melbourne. Will, all his dreamy longings made vivid, all his vague desires insistent, landed in the city which has been called "marvellous," waiting, hoping, and expecting much. In three weeks, he left it on his way to the great inland centre of Ballarat.

The first faintness of disappointment's early stages had come over him, and the sensitive soul of the man shrank back from his ears and eyes, weary with longing deferred, frightened by the littleness of things, nine-tenths of which it did not understand. His hopes had been very high, and his half-formed ideas of Australian capitals had shaped themselves into pictures of great cosmopolitan centres, and changing places. He had thought of junctions of broad Bohemian streams, down which floated the rafts and canoes of Colonial traffic, in which travelled the men whose birthright was naturalised citizenship of the world beyond seas. The coming and going of pio-

neerdom was what Will had thought of in connection with Australian cities; and above all, in all he had dreamed of these Southern centres, there had been largeness in the sense of freedom from conventionality, and a smell of virgin soil.

With a blindness which Leonard Hinton would have sighed over as being distinctly suggestive of the artist and not of the journalist, Will, having dreamed his dreams and found them unrealised, was unable to see the much that was worth seeing of which he had not dreamed.

He presented two letters of introduction, obtained for him in London by Hinton, and was afforded the privilege of visiting one or two smart houses in Toorak. This was Will's glimpse into society, and to him, with his vague notions of cosmopolitan centres, it seemed infinitely more conventional, its functions savouring more of the stereotyped, than had all he had known of old world social life.

Australia's great bubble, the Melbourne land-boom, had not then burst, and Will saw a city of lavish display. The atmosphere of America's Wall Street pervaded every thoroughfare, and the trail of the land-speculator was over all things. Melbourne swam in champagne, in the intervals of a feverishly keen commercial tension which made young faces old and black hair grey, with its breathless intensity. Commerce, in the sense of any kind of jobbing not connected with real production, was something Will had never known of, and had not dreamed of in his

anticipations of life in the South Pacific. And at that period Melbourne was one huge jobbing exchange.

Will, looking for picturesque cosmopolitanism, saw dimly, through the mist of his anticipatory dreams, a lavishly coloured and exaggerated caricature in miniature, of old world commerce, old world social life, and old world conventionality. He turned from the fever of the city, and was introduced to the lamentable young man who orders his hats from London. He listened, in pained wonder, to the conversation of the pretty girl who persists in talking of "the season at Home," when she might talk gracefully of her father's station, or the side of Melbourne suburban life which she knows. He saw these things, and missed absolutely, the characteristic beauties, the distinctive interests of the place.

Then, weary with disappointment, he hurried away from Bourke and Collins streets, — two of the most interesting thoroughfares in the Southern hemisphere, — and travelled to Ballarat for a glimpse of the provincial life of the colony. The life of the provincial towns seemed to Will a reduced reproduction of the life of the capital; and it was from the littleness of the capital that he had turned in the chill of hope unrealised, and dreams dispelled.

So he journeyed on to the mother colony, and, losing in the more peaceful air of New South Wales the feverish atmosphere of speculative Melbourne, he was appealed to strongly by the great natural beauties

of the surroundings of Sydney. Here, too, he saw less of the young man with the hat, and heard less of the young lady who talks "Home." Indirectly, also, he came a little more into contact with the people of the soil, those who pertain really to the country, rather than to a phase of its development merely.

But the impression left by it all was one of failure. The realisation so far was to Will as painful as its preliminary step had been stimulating, in its assurance of his wisdom in leaving England. From the enthusiastic hopefulness of being on the verge of grasping, knowing, and attaining, Will's life seemed to have become a complete discord; and in writing to Trottie in far-off England — a letter from which Will thought he had excluded the bitter flavour of his weariness and disappointment — he said: —

"I am not exactly weeping because of the absence of fresh worlds to conquer. So far, I have no consciousness of having conquered any of the planets that be. But I am looking, a little wearily, for some part of one world that I can grasp and make mine, something that will appeal to me in this great island child of England. I have 'done' Melbourne — I use the word because it expresses the feeling the process produced. I believe Melbourne to be an incubating ground for globe-trotters. I have been through the provincial towns of Victoria. And now I am trying to learn Sydney, so far with the impression of its being a rather commonplace stone, in a gorgeously beautiful, natural setting. I told you what a revela-

tion that voyage was to me. I hardly dared to tell myself of all I hoped would follow it. But this cannot be all, — this little trivial emptiness. No, Trottie, after that voyage I do not say, 'Is this all'? I say with certainty, if wearily, that it is not all; and that I must and will find more. I am going to try the country itself, the interior, now, leaving towns severely alone for the present, at all events. Perhaps I shall find it there. In the mean time, as I said, this cannot be all."

And reading the letter, thousands of miles away in the garden of The Elms, James Cumming's dainty daughter, who to Will would always be Trottie — Trottie prayed that he might find it there.

CHAPTER XXXVI

DOWN, DOWN, DOWN

Success, to some a useful tonic, a gentle stimulant to further advance, seems to act as a delirious intoxicant on others. So misfortune, a sloth-removing drug, a purifying perfume to some, is a brain-befogging, conscience-rotting opiate to others.

Writes the poet of "Karshish, Cleon, Norbert and the fifty": —

> "I knew a man was kicked like a dog
> From gutter to cesspool; what cared he
> So long as he picked from the filth his prog.
> He saw youth, beauty, and genius die,
> And jollily lived to his hundredth year."

But not so the fallen man in whom was ever any brilliance, who has ever held what was won by strength, superficial or real.

When Robert Darley drove away from the Grange at Bramwood, after his heated dismissal by James Cumming, he swore savagely, under his breath, at nothing and at everything in general, and that, within ten seconds of hearing tender Trottie's last sympathetic "Good-bye!" A few months before that would have seemed impossible; but, to a man of

Middle Greyness

Robert Darley's mental and moral constitution, a month's complete abandon to excess of different kinds is an almost fatal dose of a fibre-sapping poison.

As he travelled up to London that night, the whole bitterness of his position entered the man's drug-clouded soul, forcing its sordidness through all the flimsy barriers which his month with Rollo Croft had raised between himself and the real world, and branding hopelessness in hot letters on his heart. Such a moment might be a turning-point in the lives of some men, from which would be taken a path leading straight to success. In Robert's life, it meant simply groping for a path which should bring him to Rollo Croft.

There was no question in Robert's mind of making good resolutions. The black streak had less to fight against in him than in the strong man from whom, perhaps, he had inherited it. To him occurred no thought of starting afresh on a clean page of his life's book, of making up lost ground, regaining power thrown aside. He thought of all that the break from James Cumming meant; and the weakness born in him ruled absolutely paramount throughout the man's whole being.

"Two hundred a year," he muttered, kicking idly at the opposite seat of the railway compartment of which he was the sole occupant. "Great heavens, what does he think two hundred a year is to me? I have spent treble that in the last month. But still, an annuity — One may raise something on that;

and he will never carry out what he says. He will never let me actually want for money."

Arrived in London, Robert's thoughts turned instinctively towards Rollo Croft, and all the licence of excess which was connected in his mind with the artist who lived in West Kensington. So on the next day he proceeded to Scarborough; and whilst saturating himself in an exaggeration of the atmosphere which surrounded Rollo Croft and Bèté there, he told his friend of his reception at and dismissal from the Grange.

Cold steel entered the artist's eyes as his friend told the story. His conventional expression of sympathy at the end of its recital would have been a positive insult to the Robert Darley of two months before. On the Robert of that day, Croft's reception of his news made simply no impression whatever.

As Rollo Croft afterwards said in speaking to Bèté, "Whether as a politician a man is a brilliant success or a startling failure is a commonplace alternative of absolute indifference to me. Personally, I had rather my friend were neither one nor the other, because either position betrays a certain desire to take life with barbarous seriousness. But, and if I knew how, I would be serious on this point myself, I must avoid a man in want of money. A man in that position will sap the caviarre from out the life of any one. It is hideous to think of, and it is brutal of such a man to force himself upon one and give one the pain of cutting him."

Robert had ceased to interest the artist, because

necessity had now begun to press sordidness into view in all the man's excesses. So to make separation easy, Croft returned to his house in Kensington; and Robert, travelling with him as far as the metropolis, then found himself adrift in London.

A man struck down by a public disgrace, and suddenly deprived of the means which had enabled him to live on any particular rung of the social ladder, is cut off, with marvellous completeness and rapidity, from his former surroundings. The political set in which Robert had moved was now something to him as unapproachable as it would have been to a Whitechapel fruit peddler. He could not frequent his club, because want of funds prohibited it, and the unpleasantness of averted looks and attempts at avoidance made it undesirable. The same prohibitions applied to all his old haunts. So for a while Robert drifted about, living a life of coarse dissipation, in the country where nothing is draped, and which lies between clubland and the lower walks of Lower Bohemia.

Then he became actually in want of money to meet his immediate needs; and, fallen as he was below the reach of ordinary humiliation, he appealed to James Cumming for assistance. Before this Rollo Croft had become less than a name to him. The man who called at The Elms not long after Will's departure from England, and gave his name to a servant who did not know him, as Robert Darley, was one whose mere appearance would have been horrifying to tender-hearted Trottie, had she seen it. She did

not, however; and Robert's interview with her father was as brief as it was painful. It ended in the millionaire's giving to this adopted son, on whom he had, to use his own words, "lavished thousands," four five-pound notes, and telling him, with bitter emphasis, that he never wished to see his face again.

The readiness with which Robert accepted this money, thrown to him as some men would not fling coppers to a beggar, was even more pitiable than contemptible, to one remembering the heights he had reached less than a year before. His words on this occasion were not things such as one cares to dwell upon or to repeat. For the humiliation of the man in whom shame, being choked, is dead, is hardly less painful to look upon than is the madness of a man whose brain has given way.

Even at this stage, the purely vicious strain which had suggested madness to the doctor in the House of Commons, and which, lacking all influence from without to balance it, had made of Robert a wreck, — this, showing in his every movement, prevented him, even in view of the circumstances which had made him appeal to James Cumming, from endeavouring to establish himself in any kind of occupation. But absolute beggary was staring him in the face, and Robert Darley, in the midst of all the vitiation which the past year had meant to him, cudgelled his clouded brains to think of a course in which poverty could be avoided, and the animal indulgences which had become part of his broken manhood, maintained.

Middle Greyness

Sitting in the poorly furnished room he occupied in a third-rate lodging-house, kept by want of money from such resorts as had of late been his, Robert was pondering one night over the nature of his then position. In his weakness, the man sickened at his own inability to even think connectedly.

"Good God!" he muttered. "What am I to do? What can I do?"

For an hour, he sat there in the growing darkness of evening, murmuring from time to time in his helplessness; his only motive in thought, a desire to find the means of gratifying his hunger for extremes, for savage excess. And the end of his reflections, spoken aloud in the darkness of the beggarly room he occupied, expressed in five words at once the depth of degradation the man had reached, and his complete subjugation to the black streak which, finding raised to it no breath of strength's opposition, had taken possession of him.

"Have n't I got a father — somewhere?"

He remembered clearly enough James Cumming having said that in all probability Frederick Manton Darley was dead. But he also remembered that no positive ground had been shown for the assumption.

"There 's no reason why he should n't be alive somewhere," Robert muttered. "And whatever a man's adopted father may do, his own father is bound to help him."

Then Robert, broken and derelict earlier in life than many men find their first footing, lay down to try

and sleep, vowing that if this father of his were above ground, he would find him and obtain help from him.

Starting out, next day, with, for the first time for many months, a definite object in view, Robert visited the bank at which James Cumming had made his annuity payable. He knew that no payment would be due for some months, but, in the course of an interview with one of the heads of the establishment, he succeeded in obtaining the authority which he knew would enable him to raise money on his future interest in the annuity. This he did. And then, the very weakness of the man giving him some fixity of purpose in pursuing the object he now had in view, he placed himself in the hands of a private enquiry agent.

Particulars of his father's early life he knew to a limited extent, and James Cumming had told him the period at which Frederick Darley had left England. These facts, with all the other information he could gather, he put before the enquiry agent, with instructions simply to ascertain the whereabouts, if living, of Frederick Manton Darley. Then, with just that amount of forethought which would have served to show, to a close observer, how great had been his fall, Robert put aside a certain small portion of the money he had obtained, with a view to the final achievement of his humiliation, and then proceeded to live over again the life of the past six months.

Despite the lapse of time which at first made the project of following his father's movements, after leav-

ing England, seem a difficult task, the agent Robert employed found it easy to trace the elder Darley as far as Rio Janeiro, to which port it appeared he had proceeded direct, and under his own name, from London. Then came several months of corresponding with agents, first in South America, and finally in Australia, this correspondence tracing Frederick Darley under his own name.

Then, by the chance of an advertisement falling into the hands of a Sydney enquiry agent who years before had landed in Australia from South Africa with Darley, and had met him in Narrabri when he had changed his name; Robert Darley, in London, learned that his father had assumed the name of Arthur Crawford. Very shortly after this he knew that the address at which letters from Sydney found his father was, Arthur Crawford, Post Office, Wydah.

The only question which now puzzled Robert was the very sordid one of how to reach the place in which he had learned that his real father lived. The man's ever increasing weakness had effectually prevented his acting up to the cautiousness which had induced him to lay aside a portion of the money he had raised. And now that the agent he employed had succeeded in tracing the whereabouts of the father on whose charity he hoped to subsist, Robert found that his last penny barely sufficed to cover the expenses of the search.

All the money he possessed went then to the agent; and, reduced by the life he had led to physical wreck,

whilst morally he had sunk almost as low as a man may sink, Robert found himself turned adrift from the lodging which had been the scene of his last excess, without the means of satisfying the needs of a single day, far less of proceeding to the country in which his father lived.

Long since, in looking for Will with a view to obtaining his help, he had found that his brother had left London, though for what destination Robert neither knew nor cared to know.

Then there came a night when Robert Darley, recently a member of the Carlton Club, and a celebrity amongst young political stars, was adrift in the streets of the great metropolis, without food or the means of obtaining shelter. On that night, groaning in the pain of his misery and degradation, poor, contemptible, broken Robert Darley cursed the author of his existence in far-off Australia, for handing on to him that black streak which he felt choking him.

He cursed weakly in his helplessness, and then he prayed weakly in his misery. And then he told himself there was no hope left in his life.

Part VI

CHAPTER XXXVII

BEFORE DAWN

PERHAPS the chief charm of life and travel in the outlying portions of the earth's surface is the freedom of intercourse between man and man which, under all and any circumstances, one generally finds in these places. In Australia, for instance, one rarely remains for five minutes in a railway carriage without speaking to or being spoken to by a fellow-traveller.

Will Darley had with him no letters of introduction to any one resident in the capital of New South Wales, and, though a companionable man enough under ordinary circumstances, was not, at the time of his arrival in Sydney, by any means passing through a friend-making phase. His recent disappointments had been too keenly felt for that. Coming North from Albury, however, he had, after hours spent in gazing through the windows of a railway carriage at gum-trees flying past in endless succession, dropped into conversation with a young solicitor who was one of the three other occupants of the compartment.

The solicitor, a New South Welshman by birth, was appealed to by Will's evident sense of loneliness, and took some pleasure in talking to the young Englishman of the country through which they were passing. In parting on Redfern station platform in Sydney, the solicitor gave Will his card, and obtained a promise from his companion of the journey to dine with him on the following evening at his pretty little house in Bondi, — a suburb of Sydney which has the rolling Pacific for its immediate background.

Had this meeting occurred during the earliest days of Will's sojourn in the country, he might have been saved a good deal of disappointment. As it was, he met several pleasant people of the genuine and good Australian kind; and when, a day or so before he had written to Trottie, telling her of his Victorian impressions, he mentioned to Mrs. Layton, the solicitor's pretty young wife, that he wanted to go into the country proper, then various facilities were promptly offered him.

"There is that young Mr. Bradford, Tom," said Mrs. Layton to her husband. "He is going up to his father's station, somewhere Manning River way — Gloucester, I think it is — on Tuesday. I am sure he would be delighted to have Mr. Darley's company, and to show him about the district. Then, there are the Riverstons of Tamworth; they are always wanting you to go and have a week's kangarooing. We could give Mr. Darley a letter of introduction to them, and it would be a real charity

to those girls to go and spend a month with the Riverstons. Oh, and there's Uncle Andrew right out Walgett way, on the Darling; and the Crewes at Mudgee, and" — Mrs. Layton shrugged her plump shoulders as though to imply that the number of country houses at which Will would be made welcome was simply endless — "I assure you, Mr. Darley, there is no lack of places for you to go to, and wherever it is you will find people all glad to see you."

Will Darley was very sensitive to kindness of any sort, and, coming after the solitude and disappointments of the last month or two, this hospitable readiness to help and generally to befriend him, made him very grateful. There were many plans suggested, and much pleasant indecision caused thereby. But the end of the matter was, that, within a week of Will's mention of his wishes to Mrs. Layton, he left Sydney with young Ned Bradford for the Manning River, having received an invitation from "old Bradford" to come to Karelah, his station, and remain there as long as he chose.

"And then," said Mrs. Layton, "you will be able to choose your own route. We will give you a letter to the Riverstons at Tamworth, and afterwards, if you care to travel far enough west, you can go on to my uncle's station near Walgett."

"Anyhow," said the solicitor, following up his wife's remarks, "be sure you write to us and let us know how you are getting on, and we will write to you at Karelah."

So Will started for the country with young Bradford, carrying with him all sorts of good wishes from people who, up till a few weeks before, had never even heard his name.

Ned Bradford, five feet, eleven inches, in his stockings, and aged just twenty, was a good specimen of the best kind of young Australian, and a sportsman to the marrow of his bones, both in his love of sport, and in his creeds and beliefs. As he had told Tom Layton, the solicitor, he had "cottoned right away" to Will Darley, which, in view of the sharp contrast presented by their respective habits and temperaments, was, perhaps, not unnatural.

Will liked the brown-skinned, wiry young Australian for the obvious good nature and transparent "whiteness" which shone from out his bright eyes, and appeared in every careless sentence which fell from his lips. Besides this, Will felt at once that Ned Bradford represented a type, and a type which he, Will, did not know. The young fellow's open-handed generosity, the crudeness of his ideas on all subjects outside sport and the soil of Australia, his irresponsibility, absolute freedom of speech, inborn irreverence, and genuine oblivion to the possibility, not to mention the justice, of any kind of restraint; all combined to make him an interesting study to the Englishman.

By an unfortunate chance, Will Darley was attacked by a violent bout of neuralgia when travelling with young Bradford on the Northern railway line between Sydney and Newcastle. One result of this

was that for twenty-six out of the twenty-eight hours occupied by the journey to the homestead of his host, Will hardly saw daylight. He was not by any means a stranger to the neuralgia trouble, but did not remember ever before being prostrated by it to the same extent as on this occasion, when the reaction of all the mental worry and depression of the last month seemed to be thrumming and vibrating through every nerve in his body. So, when the two embarked on the little Newcastle steamer which carried them up the Stephen's River to Raymond Terrace, Will saw nothing of the magnificent richness of that wine-growing country. And, during the coach journey of sixty miles through the Clarence River district to Gloucester, the Englishman had not even a glimpse of the luxuriant vegetation and verdantly beautiful valleys which make that part of the colony beloved by all who visit it.

Just after sunset on the day following the departure from Sydney, and when Ned Bradford had told his friend that they would be at Karelah in a couple of hours, Will's neuralgia suddenly left him. He and the young Australian happened to be the only passengers by the coach, and, despite the discomfort entailed by its jolting and swaying in rough parts of the road, had, during the last hour, been curled up on the inside seats, while a fine rain was falling outside. Will's sense of relief, at the sudden cessation of a pain which had made him almost light-headed, was great. Finding that the rain had stopped,

young Bradford asked the coach-driver to pull up, whilst the two "insides" transferred their allegiance to the box-seat.

There was no trace of moon or stars to be seen at the time, and sky and Bush and air alike were an unbroken mass of deep, soft darkness, — darkness so sweet and fragrant after the gently soaking rain that Will, eased of an almost unbearable burden of pain, felt his eyes growing moist and his heart swelling with gratitude for the tender beauty of it all. He could see nothing and hear nothing, save the rhythmical clatter of the four coach-horses' feet. But the very blackness of the outlook was beautiful, so deep and soft it was. A gentle breeze seemed in its movements caressing, and the faint perfume with which the air was laden, of wet gum-leaves, dripping wattle-clusters, and sodden cedar bark, was so dreamily sweet, so tenderly soothing, that Will, charmed and fascinated by this sudden wave of beauty, hardly dared to breathe lest the spell it threw over him should be broken. It was in this way and in these surroundings, that the end came of a journey which to the Englishman had been very full of pain.

When the coach stopped, and Will Darley dismounted with his friend at the spot where the Karelah track turns off from the Gloucester road, two men, themselves riding, and each leading a spare horse, appeared from out the solid blackness of a clump of young cedars which the new arrivals could not see. The Gloucester district is rich in its growth of cedar

wood. The two men on horseback dismounted, and, as they led their horses forward, one of them said:

"It is you, Ned, is n't it?"

Young Australia laughingly acknowledged his identity; and, having introduced Will to his brothers, the four were soon in the saddle and walking their horses quietly down the track. The two portmanteaux belonging to Will and to Ned Bradford were left lying under the cedars by the side of the track.

"You are not afraid of leaving things about, here in the Bush," observed Will, as the horses picked their way cleverly along in the darkness.

"Lord bless you, no!" said the elder of Ned's brothers. "There 's no one about here to touch 'em; and if there were, they would n't have the cheek. My word, we would track 'em down from here to Snowy River, would n't we, Ned?"

Ned laughed and swung round his head the stockwhip he had taken from his brother's hand. Its lash fell with a crack like the report of a rifle.

"So, steady, horse! Who wants to hurt you? Hold your head up, you brumby! Buck, then, if you want to buck, and jump your immortal soul out! Whoop! Sail then, bay brumby. Gallop for your life. Hullo there, Karelah! Hullo! Coo-ey!"

And the clear young voice grew fainter and fainter through the trees as, yielding to an impulse of sheer light-heartedness, fostered by the breath of the Bush he loved, added to by the pleasure of home-coming,

and caused actually by the reckless love of excitement inherent in his race, the young bushman gave his wiry pony its head, and darted off into the black night towards the station.

The two brothers leaned back in their saddles to laugh, whilst Will Darley watched all this with growing delight. Then they began to apologise to their guest for the young one's rudeness.

"Ned 's had too much corn," said one of the brothers. "He wants grass feeding, and a week in the saddle. But you were speaking of the luggage. We were not certain of your coming, and thought you 'd rather ride than drive, anyhow, after the coaching. But we 'll send a man back for them with a buggy from the homestead; and you 'll excuse our unceremonious way of welcoming you, won't you? I 'm afraid we 're growing regular bushies at Karelah."

"Believe me," said Will, with some enthusiasm, "I cannot feel that there is anything to excuse, for, compliments aside, I have enjoyed this last half hour more than all the rest of the time I have spent in Australia put together."

So the three were on excellent terms with each other by the time they had dismounted outside the verandah of Karelah homestead, having passed through the slip-rail entrance left open by Ned, and cantered briskly across the smooth home-paddock. All the surroundings were still pitchy black, and Will had seen literally nothing of the country. Yet the breath of it all was in his nostrils; his heart throbbed sympa-

thy with the soft darkness round him; and he felt that he should make a friend of this great garden wilderness.

Standing at the open hall entrance of the far-spreading, one-storied homestead were grouped Mr. and Mrs. Bradford, Ned's two sisters, and himself. And in five minutes Will Darley was on conversational, not to say friendly, terms with them all. Then, after a hasty wash and change of travel-stained clothing, came supper in the big living-room, with its great wide-open window-doors through which the fragrance of the damp night without came from across a twelve-foot wide verandah, filling the house with its perfume.

Very pleasant, Will found it all; and when, a couple of hours afterwards, he stood at the open window of the room he was to occupy, and, gazing out into the soft night, listened to the far away music of bullock-bells booming on a hillside two miles from the house, he told himself, first, that he should love this Bush to which he had come, and then, that he had never felt more blest with a sense of surrounding beauty than at that moment.

Early on the following morning, Will Darley was waked by a perfect fusilade of whip-cracks outside his open window. After the family gathering over a very free-and-easy breakfast, he went out with Ned and the two older brothers to be initiated into the glories of hunting the "brumby," as Australians call the wild Bush horse whose sire's hide has never been touched by branding iron.

Before Dawn

"You can trust the yellow mare," said Ned, in confidence; "she 's the cleverest Bush pony in Gloucester; and if you don't pull her head about at all, she 'll gallop you through an apple scrub, and never graze your stirrup-irons."

Will was an excellent horseman, though Bush-riding was of course new to him; and, taking Ned's hint in the matter of giving the "yellow" mare her head, he came to no harm in the course of a morning's ride such as he had never dreamed of in the Oxford days even, when riding was a recreation he had favoured.

Close behind a snorting, flying mob of brumbies led by a wicked-looking grey stallion, Will and the three brothers galloped with loose reins, down hillsides strewn with fallen logs, through breast-high wattle-scrub, with heads in their horses' manes under over-hanging cedar branches, sliding and scrambling through blind gullies, and splashing and thundering over the stony beds of shallow creeks. Neck and neck, Ned raced by the side of the stallion leader of the mob, the hissing thong of his whip circling continuously over his head, as slowly, surely, he headed the snorting brumby towards the far-stretching wing of a roughly constructed Bush yard.

The two brothers on either flank of the mob, and Will on his "yellow" mare bringing up the rear, the pace became positively furious, as they flew down the clear slope below which lay the Bush yard. Then with an echoing fire of stock-whips, and a peal of

hoarse yells from the three brothers, the grey stallion was turned by a final breathless spurt, within six feet of the end of the wing.

Down the gradually narrowing track, followed by his harem and their body-guard, the Bush sultan galloped in angry amazement, his tail erect and mouth wide open. Then a final salvo from the three stock-whips, and an ear splitting yell from Ned, announced that the rails had been passed, and that the mob was in the yard.

This was the first of several subsequent brumby-hunts in which Will took part; and if, in the wild exhilaration of those gallops, a study of the Bush itself was impossible, yet in the home-coming and out-going Will saw enough of the country round Karelah to make him an enthusiastic admirer of that district. He saw enough of it to make him feel that it was this, and not the cities, the land-boom, the cable-trams, or any of the things which he had seen and been disappointed by,— this wonderful, fragrant, luxuriant Bush,— which was really Australia, the spirit and soul of that huge island of the South. And something told him that it was near to that he had looked for; that he loved it, and would yet love it infinitely more.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

AWAKING

TIME does not count for much in the Bush. One of the most pleasing features of the vast watershed of which the Gloucester district forms part is the charming deliberation and restful absence of anything like haste which characterises the lives of its inhabitants.

Day succeeded day in Will Darley's stay with the Bradfords, and each recurring period of sunshine seemed to reveal new charms, whilst the coming of every fragrant night imbued the Englishman more deeply with a sense of the tender beauty of the place. Shearing time was drawing near, however; and though kindly Mr. and Mrs. Bradford made it quite clear that they recognised no limit beyond which their friend should not continue to eat their salt, yet Will felt that, where such hospitality imposed no limits, he should himself be only the more careful to establish one. And the time had arrived when he thought he ought to bring his happy visit to a close.

Then came the question of where the Englishman was going, and how he intended to get there. Will's project, formed vaguely with a desire to avoid leaving the Bush, was to ride across country to Tamworth,

and having seen that district, and visited the family to whom the Laytons in Sydney wished to introduce him, to work out West by easy stages, along the Namoi River to Walgett and the Darling. The objection promptly raised to this by bushman Ned Bradford was, that between Gloucester and Tamworth were no roads, but only sheep tracks; and that, therefore, Will, guileless as yet in the subtleties of Bush travel, would infallibly lose himself and his horse, and become merged in the great unknown.

"I'd come myself like a shot, if I could," said the young Australian; "and like nothing better; but there's shearing coming on, and not a hand's turn been done to the wool-shed yet, so I could n't very well manage it."

"No, I'm afraid we could not spare you just now, Ned," said the father; "though I expect you will loaf more than any two sun-downers during the season." The two elder brothers chuckled audibly. "Still I confess you are worth half-a-dozen of your brothers." Ned laughed aloud. "And so I think we must keep you in harness. But," continued Mr. Bradford, meditatively, "I don't see why Mr. Darley's scheme should n't be worked all the same. There's the Chief Justice, you know."

"Why, of course," broke in Ned. "What a wonder you are, Dad. There's the Chief Justice, and he'd like nothing in the world better, providing he's kept going in tobacco, with a tot of rum and a feed at night."

Awaking

The Chief Justice, whose simple tastes in the matter of creature comforts were so enthusiastically pointed out by Ned Bradford, was a young Myall River black, the greater part of whose life had been spent in the Karelah paddocks, and whose allegiance to his parents was as nothing compared with his unswerving devotion to the Bradford family. As Ned subsequently pointed out, the Chief Justice, regarded as a man or a youth, was "not pretty to look at; but, for an aboriginal, he's just as white as they make 'em." As regards the cuticle merely, the Chief Justice was so far from white that Ned's eldest brother had been known to offer odds that charcoal would make a white mark on his "hide." Yet, granting this, there was no denying the dazzling whiteness of his teeth, and, so Ned affirmed, of his disposition.

"Well, my advice," said the host of Karelah, "is that you do without a pack-horse, which is only a nuisance. If you 'll let me, I should like to make you a present of your saddle fixings; and the Chief Justice will do the rest. He would steal a horse for you, if you 'd let him; but perhaps it would be as well to start fair by buying one. You can get a hardy, little, broken-in brumby about here for fifty shillings; and, I daresay, for a fiver, Ned can find a really decent Bush mount for you. You can reach Karu easily, in a day, and sleep there; then Baradoon on the next night, and Nundle on the third. After that, you take the coach road for Tamworth, and from Tamworth you can keep on a good highway, if you like, right away

through Gunnedah, Wee Waa, Pilliga, over the Namoi, and on to Walgett and the Darling River. And — I 'd like to be doing it with you," added Will's kindly host.

It was in this way, and acting entirely on the hints given by Mr. Bradford, that, after warm good-byes, accompanied by little presents of spurs and a silver-mounted stock-whip, Will Darley left Karelah. The morning was young, and the sunlight fresh and clear, when, with the Myall River black loping along on foot beside him, Will rode slowly out through the slip-rails of the home-paddock, into the sweet-smelling Bush at the back of the house.

"Good-bye, old chap!" shouted Ned, for the third time; and then, with one brown hand raised to his mouth, he cooeyed, just to show his prowess in that line, and added, at the top of his voice, "You 'll send the Lord Chief back from Tamworth, and — sober, won't you?"

Will nodded a laughing reply; and then he disappeared from the view of those on the broad verandah, as he entered the leafy patch of wattles beyond Karelah creek.

It was very odd, but none the less true, that much as Will had enjoyed his stay at Karelah, — more indeed than he remembered ever before having enjoyed a visit, — yet he had not been riding with the Chief Justice more than two hours, when he told himself, with something like reproach, that he was glad and happy to be away from that hospitable station.

Awaking

He was touching the Bush now. Whereas, before, he had merely felt full of admiration for its beauty, as he had looked at it with Ned Bradford and his brothers.

The atmosphere of the great rambling homestead; the motherly kindness of Mrs. Bradford; the pleasant intercourse with the two girls; the smoking and lounging through evenings on the verandah; the breathless, scrambling gallops after brumbies, — all this had been delightful, and something Will could have enjoyed for an indefinite period. But now it had gone with its pleasing distractions, and Will's mind took a long, uninterrupted breath, and then asserted itself. His soul, dropping its flowing cloak of courtesy with a sigh of languor, lay then in modest nakedness breathing the beauty of a new world. Will realised that he wanted to be alone with this Bush. It was strange and very beautiful, the effect of it all on the dreamer of Rugby and Oxford, and the unsuccessful rooter in Fleet Street.

If one takes a grain of saccharine, and allows it to fall in a cup of hot water, the result is suggestive of quaint ideas. It will sink in the water, and remain quiet and hidden for a few seconds. Then, in its innate strength, it springs, bubbling whiteness, to the surface, and, with a tiny rushing sound, disintegrates, and pours out its sweetness through the whole flaccid body of water. The surface of Will Darley's mind was bubbling.

"Is the — Is the Bush" — Will lowered his voice in pronouncing its name — "all like this, Justice?"

asked Will, turning to the black boy, whose long fingers rested lightly on the back of the saddle which had been Mr. Bradford's present to his departing guest.

The Chief Justice had been contemplating the question of tobacco supply for some little time past, and, looking upon this conversational opening as a favourable opportunity for broaching the subject, said quickly: —

"No, no; no be all same — er — Gib it baccy, boss! Umph?"

The final pleading ejaculation would have melted a whole anti-smoking crusade committee; and Will at once gave the boy three-quarters of a small plug of gold flake. Chief Justice, gratitude gleaming from his rolling eyes, took from the broken plug a chew as large as a half-crown, and murmured happily:

"Tanky, boss! When 'e get 'nurra side Barradoon, Bush 'e be no more same; 'e be quite dibblunt."

"Ah! What did you say it was on the other side of Barradoon, Justice?"

"Quite dibblunt, boss; no more same this Bush."

"Ah, thank you, Justice;" and Will jogged on in silence again.

He had gathered that he was to see another kind of Bush; "more beauty" was the way in which he thought of it; and it would have made very little difference to him, if Chief Justice had described the rest of the Bush as a place of wood pavement and asphalt, with granite foot-walks.

As a matter of fact, the country through which he was travelling, and in which he had spent the last few weeks, was not by any means a fair sample of the Australian Bush. The Bush of the Clarence River and Gloucester district is exactly what was suggested to Will by his first half-hour on the box-seat of the Gloucester coach, during the evening of his arrival at Karelah. Fragrant, tender greenness, the luxuriant foliage of sub-tropical vegetation, dense, luscious growths, a fresh, damp atmosphere, and moist, loamy soil are amongst the most noticeable features of this district. The weird melancholy, the grotesque outlines, and gaunt timber-growths, more characteristic of the Bush proper, are not to be seen between the Hunter and the Manning rivers.

It was, perhaps, part of the same instinct that led him first to Australia, which, having braced his mind by disappointment in the towns, still farther shielded the mystical something as yet unborn in him, by bringing him into touch with the gracious beauty of all this clinging tenderness, whilst his soul was bared, before confronting him with the ghostly sadness which dominates the Bush itself.

When Will Darley and the Chief Justice arrived at Tamworth, a change came in the weather; and as they entered the wide, main street of the Northern town, rain was falling in solid sheets. Will put up at the Woolgrower's Arms hotel, in order that, when he visited the Laytons' friends, he might not appear to force their hospitality. Then, having be-

stowed upon the Chief Justice rum and tobacco to a limited extent, and a few shillings in coin of the realm, he directed that dignitary, with many thanks for his services, to return to the home of his adoption.

All through the afternoon, Will sat on the verandah of the Woolgrower's Arms, dreamily watching the heavy rain outside, and thinking. He did not ask himself what might be the nature of the subtle change then taking place in his mind. But he felt that that for which he had longed and hungered was coming to him; and his gratitude for the beauty all round him was unbounded. One would not try to tell, or seek to know, the nature of all the delicate subtleties, the pure tenderness, and the moist-eyed happiness, of the young mother's yearnings over her first-born.

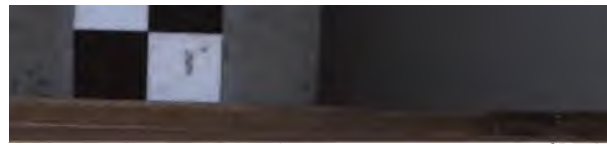
Before evening came, the rain ceased suddenly, and Nature, passing a soothing hand over the tearful face of earth and sky, revealed fresh beauties in the former, and sunset glories of purple and crimson in the latter. Then Will Darley mounted his horse and rode out into the ring-barked Bush to the north of Tamworth. As he rode, the young moon, which before the sun had set was high in the sky, emerged from out a billowing mass of fleecy, sepia-fringed cloud, and threw its soft light gently over the dripping earth.

On and on Will rode, fortunately for himself, keeping to a track between two foot-deep bullock-waggon ruts, till at last he passed Blue Gum Gully, and was really in the Bush, and six miles from a house. Up to this point, strangely enough, he had been star-

ing dreamily at his horse's head, and looking neither to one side nor the other. Yet the beauty of the moonlight scene was filtering all this while into the man's mind, and he knew that this at last was the Bush, more strange, more wonderful, in its grey, ghostly calm, than was the merely beautiful abode of greenness which he had already loved, and loved as the Bush.

This, then, was his first glimpse of the real Bush of which he had dreamed and hoped so much since leaving Sydney. It seemed to him a thing holy in its immensity, sacred in its unearthly sadness and endless loneliness. And Will Darley, his whole mental and emotional being seething in inceptive tension, Will hardly dared to think, when, reining in his walking horse on the crest of the ridge beyond Blue Gum Gully, he lifted up his eyes and gazed in wonderment between the bare tree-trunks on which raindrops glistened in the young moon's light. Then a curious thing happened to the beachcomber's son; happened and was finished within one minute of time.

There is a note of incredibility in the fact, which is, for all that, a fact, that from the day of Will Darley's landing in Melbourne, on to the moment of his looking up from his horse's head over the ridge beyond Blue Gum Gully, he had never, in waking or sleeping, given one fleeting thought, of an instant even, to the old vagabond whose talk in the little room near the sky above Holborn had led to his coming to Australia. The very fact that the influence of the



personality of the man with the black dog had moved Will more deeply than had any other influence of his London life, seemed of itself to have banished from his uneasy mind, in its new and strange surroundings, all recollection of that personality itself.

And now, for the first time, he looked out from the ridge he had reached, and saw in one flash look what was, beyond all possibility of doubt, the Bush; that eerie mysticism, which the old man had described with his nervously thrown out splashes of colour. That flash look, and all it brought with it, had come and was finished in a few seconds. But in those few seconds Will saw again the trembling, grey-haired old tramp who had left him a cheque signed, Arthur Crawford. He saw clearly, standing with one thin hand resting on the side of the open window in far-off London, the figure of the man whose few burning sentences of cynical enthusiasm had taught him to know when he did see it, and to grasp the grandeur of, the ghostly picture which lay before him beyond Blue Gum Gully.

As he turned his horse's head slowly towards the town from which he had ridden that evening, big tears, that glistened in the moonlight as they fell, dropped from Will's eyes onto the pommel of his saddle, there to form dark, round marks on the new leather.

"Forgive me, old man!" he murmured. "Heaven help me, what a brute I must have been!"

On the following morning, his mind, a tumult of

strong emotions, waiting only for a touch to bind them into being, Will Darley entered the Northern express at Tamworth, with a ticket in his pocket for Narrabri, the town at which one takes coach or horse for Wydah and the country beyond Warroo. And the horse with the new saddle from Karelah was left in the stable at the Woolgrower's Arms.

CHAPTER XXXIX

WHEN THE BLUE HAZE RISES

THE township of Wydah lay dozing contentedly in the warm sunlight of late afternoon. The elder James Carberry had, for more than an hour, been sleeping on the empty soft-goods case which stood outside the door of the general store. On the verandah of the hotel lay a black sow, dreaming in the heat, and quite alone save for the presence of an enormous horse-fly, then occupied in greedily drawing sustenance from out the veins of the unconscious pig. Not a sound disturbed the peaceful hush of the place, unless, indeed, the quiet droning of the native bees in the garden of the lock-up, or the low, even tones of James Carberry's snore, might be considered disturbing elements. The wide road, with its indefinitely marked sloping footpaths, was three inches deep in dust, for not a drop of the rain which on the previous evening had soaked Tamworth, had reached as far north-west as Wydah.

There was no one there to witness his arrival, the horse-fly being busy, and the native bees paying court at the time to a new queen; but whilst Wydah dozed in the afternoon sunshine, a man wearing a straw hat

of English make, and carrying in one hand a quince-handled stock-whip, walked his flea-bitten grey horse slowly up the white road from the south, past the lock-up, where the bees hummed in the air's dancing heat-waves, over the dry creek's culvert at the bend in the road, and on as far as the general store and post-office. There the new arrival in the sleeping township reined in his grey horse and sat gazing up and down the dust-carpeted road, a look of relief on his face, as though the aspect of the town, taking its siesta, pleased and interested him — as though he had looked for this, and was glad to find it.

Had James Carberry ceased snoring, and opened his eyes at that moment, he would have said; "Hullo! Good Lord, what 's this? Tom Dritton's grey horse from The Three Diggers, Narrabri!" Then he would have lowered one foot, and raised one eye till, seeing the rider of the grey, he would have said, "Hullo! Good Lord, it 's a new chum! Wonder if he 's goin' to shout!"

But the store-keeper did not wake, and the man on the grey horse, staring mildly at his recumbent figure, said, speaking probably to the sunshine and the native bees: —

"'Find a township called Wydah, and ask if old Crawford of Warroo Gully is still in existence. If they tell you, "No, he is dead —"'" The man on the horse stopped abruptly, and then, after looking along the road for a moment, he continued muttering. "But no, they would not tell me that. I could not

bear it, after forgetting. No, I need not ask, I 'll go and find Warroo Gully."

The man started his horse again, but pulled up within ten yards, and, looking straight down at his saddle, murmured: —

"'Then, in the evening, saddle your horse and start down the Narrabri road, just as you see a blue haze beginning to rise between the gum-trees.' Yes, but that won't be for a few hours yet. I must do as he said. I think I'll wait at this hotel and give the horse a feed."

Having no fondness for travel in the vehicles known under the generic name of "Cobb's coaches," Will Darley had, on his arrival in Narrabri that day, hired a horse at a slightly smaller outlay than that required for the purchase of a similar animal, and now, when the afternoon was late, had reached the township of Wydah.

Two hours later, when Mary Kenna had, through a hole in the weather-board partition of the hotel sitting-room, watched him playing restlessly for half an hour with the meal she had set before him, Will mounted his Narrabri horse again, and rode on along the white, silent road, just as evening's cool haze had begun to rise from the hot earth, and creep slowly up towards the lower branches of the trees beyond the township.

As he passed the new school-house, he saw a tall, attenuated young bushman, with a green-silk handkerchief round his neck, leaning against the slip-panel of the iron-bark fence.

When the Blue Haze Rises

"Good evening," said Will Darley, from the grey horse.

"Evenin', boss," said the bushman from the fence.

"Can you tell me where the track turns off this road for Warroo Gully?"

"Warroo Gully?" echoed he of the grass-green handkerchief, in the tone in which he might have said, "The Royal Academy?" had Will asked for Burlington House on the Narrabri road. "Well, it's five mile ahead on the left, just after you pass Deep Creek, beyond the old wool-shed."

The details were not of much use or interest to Will, so, thanking his informant, he rode on his way, whilst the man with the handkerchief strolled down to the hotel, and sold his news of the stranger, ten times over, for drinks.

When he arrived at the turn-off point of the Warroo track, Will recognised the spot more from his memory of what the old tramp had said in the room above Holborn, than from anything told him that evening. Then, with expectation shining and glistening in his eyes, he rode into the Bush, where the timber, though thick, was mostly ring-barked and dead.

The past three weeks had been a period of rapid growth and inception to Will. The last few hours had been a singing tension of waiting at boiling point. In him, every emotional and intellectual fibre was strained, strung to that extreme pitch at which a man

becomes physically almost phlegmatic. His mind was like the cup of water into which saccharine has been dropped, its hissing possibilities rushing headlong to the dancing surface, from which the whole body of water — Will's whole being, the artist new-born in him — shall be permeated. He rode along with head thrown back, and every sense on tip-toe, drinking in the silent beauty of the Bush.

The moon was high enough now in a clear sky to send its light, in a stream of white purity, down through the tops of the skeleton trees, throwing mystery on their nakedness, and over the coarse wiry grass, with its dressing of dead leaves which crackled faintly under the tread of the grey horse's feet. Thus were nature's beginnings made more mystical. The grotesqueness of the Bush was distorted into added weirdness by shadowy alternations of silver and greyness. Will felt this soaking into him, and running through the very tissues of his finger-ends as they rested on his horse's neck.

Then the track dipped sharply down the side of a wooded gully, and ceased to be a track. The grey horse paused on the shingly bed of a little creek. And Will, his eyes turned inward, and his ears retrospecting, heard the old vagabond of the little room in Holborn laugh, and the black dog whine, as its master said: —

"Then you will find me, and we will sit in the moonlight and laugh at it, with Satan."

Two minutes afterwards, the Warroo Hills were

echoing sharp, clear-cut successions of sound, chopped out by animal lungs from the silence of the night. A dozen jackasses from among the trees beyond the gully were cackling a discordant jangle of dismay; a little flight of disturbed flying foxes flitted, without sound, over Will's head in the moonlight; and three cockatoos flew, screaming wildly, across the gully. The Bush, which had been silent, rose, rustling the grave-clothes of its night. And the cause of it all was a kangaroo dog's furious barking.

As the ears of the grey horse from Narrabri rose into the slanting ray of moonlight which shone over the gully's far side, Will caught his first glimpse of the gunyah of the man called Crawford. Every hairy fibre of its stringy bark sides showed clear and distinct in the light of the moon. Standing open-mouthed on the log beside the gunyah, and, to Will, looking like a fine black tracing on the sky beyond, he saw the great dog whose recumbent limbs had stretched half across the little room in Holborn. Just inside the gunyah's entrance, he could see a lighted lantern swinging, its light falling on a half-filled bottle, a cup, some broken provisions, and an open book lying on a sack on the ground. And, as he looked, a figure rose from the bunk under the far side of the humpy, and Will knew that "Old Crawford of Warroo Gully" was not dead.

Half a minute afterwards, he had dismounted by the side of the iron-bark log, and the two men stood face to face in the moonlight.

Middle Greyness

"Good God! It's my — it's my friend of the Thames Embankment!" And the elder Darley, the beachcomber, recognised his son.

"I've come to you, and — the Bush — as you told me to if I were ever far enough South."

And the younger Darley, the son, recognising the old tramp he had helped in London, stretched out one hand in greeting, whilst in the other he still held the bridle of his horse.

Then the two men shook hands.

CHAPTER XL

A KING OF LOWER BOHEMIA

THE change which Will Darley saw in Crawford, when, after unsaddling and hobbling out the grey horse, the two sat one on either side of the gunyah, was a marked one and saddening. The absence of any end or desire in existence had opened wide the door of the beachcomber's life to time and advancing age. Unopposed by the strength of the man's own passionate longing and determination, the black streak had triumphed visibly over the Spirit of the Bush, and the inborn power of old Crawford's nature. The result was spreading decay.

The effect of all this was heightened and added to by the straggling, matted length of grey beard, the open-necked shirt, and the shaggy mane of hair which fell across his collar. The trembling hand which offered refreshment to Will; the far-sunken, smouldering eyes; the bent shoulders and broken voice,—all testified to the bowing at last of the strong life which had borne such strains of lurid extremes.

An older observer than Will might have said that, but for the gall of cynicism in the man's veins,

cloaked even to himself by a vein of assumed, feelingless satire, Crawford of Warroo Gully would have expired like a burnt-out candle. Will only sighed as he stretched out his hand to take the cup of whiskey and water offered him by the bushman.

After the first flash of surprise at seeing the face of his own son, there in the home of his desolation and exile, the beachcomber, remembering all that, coming before, had driven hope from his heart and vigour from his efforts in the "middle greyness," relapsed into his habitual state of cynical indifference. His inertness was moved then only by interest in a personality from an outside world, and by the presence of the man who, without any hint of knowledge of their real relations, had yet befriended him in London, and responded visibly to his influence.

They talked, and the young man told of his departure from Fleet Street, and its reasons; his arrival in Australia and its disappointments; his introduction to the country's true spirit, the Bush, and the mystical wealth of its gift to him; and, finally, of his sudden awakening in and by the Bush, to the memory of the man whose influence had first hinted directions to the vague longings of his mind.

Then a new light, of half satirical suggestion, dawned upon Crawford, the worn-out drifter on the world's beaches. His knowledge of the world, its beauty and its poetry, though stained by long indulgence in extremes, and cankered by the bitterness of his cynicism, was yet not a little thing, not a mere

superficial glimmering. For the man himself, with all his beachcombing, was yet a born artist. He was poet in his love of the beautiful; dramatist in the effectiveness of his conceptive strength, and artist to the very core in the closeness of his contact with Nature. And it was to this man, in all the savage surroundings of his vagabond life, that Will Darley, his own son, was laying bare, in all its warm, inceptive beauty, the surface of a soul in embryo.

"Bah!" The cynicism of the beachcomber laughed, and Will looked at him in surprise. The bitterness of the strong man whose one aim in life had been torn down and trampled on before his eyes, by weak Robert, made drunk by the breath of power drawn from the secretary he dismissed,— his bitterness rose in him and sneered, as he sat under the flickering light of the lantern, watching this other son's face, seeing the mind of the cut-adrift child unfolded. He laughed sneeringly, and tried to swamp thought with his waters of Lethe. But catholic love of beauty was in the man who listened to Will's story. The strength to bind, and the ability to transmit, was in the mind that recognised the art in Will's half timid, half reckless presentment. And no weight of bitterness, nor force of cynicism, could choke or kill appreciation, in the beachcomber who sat sneering in his Bush humpy.

He rose to his feet in the midst of Will's nervous utterances.

"Let us go out into the moonlight and breathe,"

he said. And Will, who had no means of associating the remark with one made to Satan under widely different circumstances in the house near Pall Mall, — Will only smiled satisfaction at the expression of an idea to him beautiful, and followed old Crawford out of the gunyah to the fallen tree, where the black dog lay.

Will could never tell or write a hundredth part of all the bushman said. The beachcomber himself would, could, never again tell such a story, preach such a sermon, as he told and preached there in the moonlight by the iron-bark log. Perhaps once, but at one time only in his life, will a man do this thing; and, given nothing of the artist's nature, he may never do it. Sitting in the dim lantern-light of the bark gunyah, Will Darley had done it. Standing outside in God's glorious moonlight, a pale, clear sky over his head, and all round him the Bush night, its weirdness, Darley the father, the world's tramp and vagabond among vagabonds, he, the beachcomber, did this thing.

There, in surroundings more ghostly, and more strangely beautiful than a man's mere pen may tell, speaking under the inspiration of a life of lurid abandon, to the naked, throbbing soul of his own son, this human storehouse of memory's tags, unfolded and spread in the moon's glamour, the creased and blotted manuscript of the artist in him, and the man.

There, beside the iron-bark log, was the black streak's embodiment. And as he turned the opening

folios of his life's scroll, his vivid, passionate sentences stuck, quivering like arrows in a target, in the mind of his son.

There, before the gunyah, his very breath as he poured out his soul's gall and its poetry, reeking of the fiend of excess in him, was the ideal beachcomber, the perfect type of "middle greyness'" outcast. And there, unfolded in the shadows of the world's strangest wilderness, torn and rumpled by the dark streak running through it, lay the ragged fabric of a nature, which, by the force of colour and poetry in it, made of this old vagabond, a prince — an emperor of Lower Bohemia.

Dazed by the tumultuous beauty of this that he saw, Will stood drinking in the old man's out-pouring of fire and passion. He gazed fixedly at the sunken eyes of the bushman, which glowed and blazed in the moonlight like living, burning coals.

Crawford of Warroo Gully had seized Will's bubbling mind in the grip of his two hands, and held it spell-bound, as a rattlesnake will hold a rabbit spell-bound, in the beautiful thraldom of its eyes. This he did in laying bare the pages of his own life's book. Then, closing that, he began: "And you —"

Will watched the great beard rising and falling, as, with shaggy head thrown back, and hands upraised, the old outcast told him who had lived it, the history of the past three weeks and the past twenty-four hours of his mind's life. Will, listening, trembled under the influence of this strange thing which came

to him from outside himself and the world he had always lived in.

"And the meaning of all this that has made your mind swim and stagger," said the beachcomber, as he stood with one cold, nervous hand resting on Will's shoulder, "is the coming of a new soul in you. The cause of the faint bewilderment that made your heart quiver like a dead gum-leaf, and your eyes wet, is the labour pain of giving life to that soul — the child of the artist in you."

"And you," murmured Will, —"you who first suggested all that brought this about, you who sowed the seed, who were a finger-post to me, tell me what this beautiful, wonderful thing will mean to me."

The flood of his vivid out-pouring checked, the bushman laughed bitterly.

"Mean to you? Why, two courses open to you, both brilliant in their way. You can cultivate it tenderly, and create great things in the world with this artist mind of yours; or — Bah! It gives you a soul to grasp the beauty of life's lurid lights, of all its dazzling colours. As I said, both are good in their way. I know more of the colours than the creation." Old Crawford laughed light cynicism.

"But it is to create, and make something worth giving the world, that I want to live for. That is all I have prayed for."

Will looked round about him as he said this, a strange, half pathetic appeal showing in his wet eyes, gazing at the scraggy trees through which the moon-

light shone, then at the deep, black shadow in the gully, and then at the old man before him.

"You were the finger-post before," he said to the beachcomber. "You *are* this Bush to me. I came here to see you and it. Tell me now what thing I shall make. I will make a book. Tell me, shall I write a book? What shall I make that may have beauty for me to give the world?"

Again old Crawford laughed, and then he said:

"What you do matters nothing; only let this soul of yours do it. You are a writer — you wanted to be. You are, really." The cynicism died out of the beachcomber's tone, his black eyes softened, and music, strong and deep, was in his voice, as he said:

"Listen to me, you young mother. Good God, I know it all! You are a writer. Now you shall do as I will say, to learn what this child of your art is."

Will nodded, trembling eagerness.

"You shall go straight from here, straight from this place, and make your way to the sea. Go then home to your own country, forgetting all things save this new soul of yours; and going, you shall write a book. Write a story that shall shake men's hearts and make women weep. You can do it. You will do it. You shall go straight from here and do this thing; and it will make you famous. Then you will know what the birth in your life means."

Will's eyes were flashing now, and his face on fire with an enthusiasm which strangely affected the bushman; because he saw in it all his own force and

brilliancy, with something added which was beyond and outside him. He knew that if he supplied the direction, the creation would be something to which he, in his bitterness, would have to bow. Will looked into the old man's eyes.

"And the subject," he said, his voice growing fuller and stronger as he spoke, — "the subject of the story I shall write, which may bring a fresh beauty into the world, it shall be — "

He paused an instant, with a smile of strong tenderness on his lips. And that instant the grey-bearded man before him said: —

"You have seen the Bush, and felt it. You heard all I told you of to-night, and felt that. Look round at all there is here. See! Quick, while the moon is on it! There! Do you see that dingo slinking along between the gums on the side of the hill? You heard the voices as you rode out to-night. You see me here, now, and the waters of Lethe." The beachcomber laughed lightly as he laid his hand on an empty bottle beside the iron-bark log. "You see the gunyah. Ah, you know it all! Let that be your story. Make your book of that, and — it shall win fame for you."

Will touched the old man's shoulder with one hand, and, gazing with shining eyes into his face, said:

"You shall be my book. You, and the Bush you love; you, and the Lethe in which you try to forget what you hate; you, who were the father of this child of mine; you, who left the cheque in my little room

in London; you, who think your heart is black iron, whilst it is white love, and only the shell it lives in is black, — you, my friend, and this great home of yours, shall be my story."

"And it shall stir the whole world, and make men and women love you. You will go straight from here in the early morning, to the sea; and, travelling to your own place, you shall write this book; and — Bah! Let us taste Lethe, now, and go to sleep."

A strange, restful calm had come over Will since the last hot words he had spoken, and, following the bushman into his gunyah, he lay down, as night was fading away before the silver-grey lights of a new day's awakening, and slept like a little child. And Darley, the father, the vagabond, sat in his bunk and drank whiskey. But once, when the golden rim of the rising sun had crept above the lower spurs of the Warroo Hills, the beachcomber stepped out of his bunk and stood beside the heap of rugs where his son lay sleeping. He looked long and earnestly at Will's tired face with its shadow-encircled eyelids. He lifted the nervous, sinewy hand that hung over the edge of the rugs, and — then he laid it gently down again. And, as he turned away, he muttered: —

"My God, Mary! Mary, forgive me!"

Then he walked out into the sunlight of the early morning.

Two hours afterwards, Will had shared the breakfast prepared whilst he slept, by the man Crawford; and, as he rose to his feet, the older man said:

Middle Greyness

"And now you will go — go right away from this place to the old world. And when you reach the old world, you will have written your story."

So Will caught and saddled his horse. The old man, with his dog Satan at his heels, walked through the gully to the track on the far side, before he said "Good-bye." Then he turned and held out his shaking hand to Will, who, with tears in his eyes, leaned forward in his saddle to grasp it.

"Good-bye, my old friend and guiding star," he said, huskily. "Remember, I will let you know before any one else, of the completion of this story, which — shall be you. Good-bye!"

"Good-bye, Will Darley," said the beachcomber. Then a light of sudden pain came into his eyes, and the dog looked up uneasily, as, with a light laugh of mockery, its master said: "And don't paint the likeness too closely. The devil is much blacker than he ought to be painted — hence, the proverb. Good-bye!"

When, a minute later, Will turned in his saddle to catch a last glimpse of his friend, the ragged old beachcomber had disappeared in the thick scrub of the gully. And Will knew that this episode in his life had ended.

The newly-awakened artist, the son, had drifted into the life of the finished vagabond, the father. And now he had drifted out again into the world beyond Warroo Gully.

CHAPTER XLI

"A PEARL, A GIRL"

"I HAVE been puzzling about her for some time past, Mr. Cumming. She is just as affectionate and kind as ever, more sweet and unselfish, I think; but she does not laugh as she used to laugh — not so often, nor so merrily."

Miss Lipston was speaking, sitting in the pretty morning-room at the Grange, in which had taken place Robert's first scene with the millionaire after his, Robert's, disgrace in Parliament. James Cumming sat listening with a not very interested look on his pale, heavy face.

"Is it not customary," he said, "for girls to have these phases? Is it not on a par with taking up sick visiting and charity nursing, after a particularly spirited series of flirtations during the season?"

"But, Mr. Cumming, Charlotte does not come under the heading of 'girls' at all."

Upon this one subject the kindly, if usually colourless, Miss Lipston held decided views, and, on occasion, could express them. She dearly loved the tender, warm-hearted girl whose governess she had been; and of late she had missed the little wayward

fancies and half petulant moods, in Trottie, which she had been wont at one time to regard as the heaviest portion of her cross in life.

"Charlotte is not at all like other girls. If she were, and if circumstances were different, I should think that some — some passing trifling with hearts" — Miss Lipston could not bring herself to the use of the word, "flirtation" — "was what occupied her mind, and caused her little fits of abstraction. But she is not like that. Your daughter never trifled with a man, Mr. Cumming; and there is no one I can think of who could have seriously touched her."

James Cumming yawned with aggressive rudeness. "Ah! You, as a woman, ought to know best; but I believe it is just those girls who never flirt, whose affairs are never suspected till a crisis arrives. There is that young artist, you know, Rollo Croft. He frequently called at The Elms, and it was certainly not to see me; because I think I have only once spoken to him since — er —"

"Yes," interposed Miss Lipston, to tide over the unpleasant reference; "and that is something I might have mentioned to you before, but I did not want to give you any cause for worry, and it really did not seem necessary."

"You need never be afraid of worrying me, Miss Lipston, in that way. These things do not worry me in the least degree." Mr. Cumming glanced carelessly at the "Deaths" on the front page of his

"Times," as though to express his imperviousness to small worries.

"Well—" Miss Lipston spoke with some pride. After all it was something for her, the colourless one, to have information to give the millionaire whom, years ago before Miss Lipston reached the maiden lady period of her life, some one else had called colourless. "Well, I became aware last week that Mr. Rollo Croft had proposed to Charlotte, and had been refused by her."

Mr. Cumming made a sound like a sneeze in embryo, as he said: —

"Ah, well! She will know better some day. I have no particular regard for the man; but I understand that he inherited a very considerable fortune, and that some of his pictures, which I must say remind me of Japanese hand-screens more than anything else, bring rather long prices. However, the girl is welcome to live and die an old — er — to maintain single blessedness forever, if she chooses."

Then James Cumming, finding the discussion very uninteresting, left the room for his study, — an apartment devoted to afternoon-sleeping, cigar-smoking, and newspaper-reading.

At the time of this discussion, dainty Trottie, the subject of it, was standing at the foot of a magnificent silver beech, and looking out dreamily over the water-lily leaves which fringed the banks of a lake in the park behind James Cumming's country house. Between two fingers she held an open letter,

which, having been written in a nervous, dashing hand on the thinnest of foreign paper, had a quaint, hieroglyphical look in the pale sunlight.

"I wonder if—" She murmured those three words aloud, and then relapsed into silence, for she was thinking thoughts which, perhaps because, as Miss Lipston said, she was "not at all like other girls," she could not have put into words had she been inclined to try.

The letter in her hand was from Will, and, coming after the epistle from Sydney which had touched on his disappointments in Australian towns, it was dated from Karelah, and dealt with his journey to, and first week's stay in, the Gloucester district. Sympathetic Trottie had sighed over the letter from Sydney which told of weariness; and where "girls" might, with some reason, have said, "Oh, this dreamer will never do anything but dream and wake, and dream and wake again!" Trottie, reading pain and disappointment in every line, had stroked the crumpled pages tenderly with her little hands, and said, "Poor old Will! It's a long time coming; but it will come." And she had been nearer to this brother-cousin of hers than ever before, in the pure woman's sympathy which made her feel, in stroking the blotted paper, that she would, if she could, have stroked the hot forehead of the man who had written the letter.

And now in the letter Trottie had read as she stood under the silver beech that morning, Will

raved eloquently through four sheets of vivid word-painting, of the green, tender country he had found in Australia; of the fragrance of the damp nights, and the freshness of the dewy mornings; of the happy, free, and simple life at Karelah; of the clean-limbed brothers, children of the soil, and of the bright, happy sisters, with their unaffected modesty. She read all this and sighed; for Will did not seem so near to her as in the sad, blotted letter of his disappointments. She read it a second time, and sighed; for she was not sure that she wanted to be so near to her brother-cousin as she had been in reading the other letter.

And perhaps there are matters one should not try to peer too closely into; for maidenhood and a maiden heart are very tender, sacred things, the fine lines of which love's artist eye may catch, but crude humanity's gaze is apt to miss, and brutally to libel in coarse analysis. A man may sum up boldly much dainty mystery by saying, "Providence is kind. Nature bows her motherly head in merciful deference to our social laws, and, closing the lips of the frank boy Love, in a girl's heart, will not let him say, 'It is I, Love,' until Love's object, outside the wondering girl, shall have declared himself."

So crude man may say, and beyond that it is surely well he should not seek to pry. But one may fancy, one is made to dream, by girls who, like Trottie, are "not at all like other girls," that there may be some mystical half-presence, veiled in purity's white sheen,

fragile and dainty as a bubble in sunlight, fragrant and subtle as the breath of kyok blossom in tropical night, — a presence which is not the frank boy Love, nor yet his herald, but an ethereal, undeclared something, which comes to ascertain whether there is a place where Love's herald may enter without brushing with his flowing robe the delicate fibres of a maiden heart.

After the sad, weary letter from Sydney, Trottie wanted Will, and could not tell herself why or for what reason. After this last letter, read under the silver beech, the girl did not know whether or not she did want the brother-cousin to whom she would never be "Charlotte," but always "Trottie." So, thinking mistily of these things, Trottie wandered back to the Grange, and met Miss Lipston on the terrace at the back of the house, where the two stood talking for some time.

"What are you thinking of, Charlotte?" said the one-time governess, after a few minutes' silence. "You have been growing very dreamy of late. Tell me, dear, what are you thinking of just now."

"I was thinking of poor Robert," replied Trottie, quietly. "Why did he come to see Father before we left The Elms last week; and why would Father not let me see him?"

"Your father did not want you to see him, dear; because, unfortunately, Robert has been leading a life which has made him very ill and wretched."

Trottie shivered, and instinctively refrained from further questioning on that point.

"And," continued Miss Lipston, "he came because he wanted some money with which to leave England."

"And did Father give him the money?"

"Yes. He gave him the money, thinking it would be better for Robert to go away where, perhaps, he could begin over again, and forget all about the failure and disgrace of the old life in London."

Trottie was silent for a minute, and then said, "Where is Robert going, Miss Lipston?"

"He is going, I believe, to Australia; but — I must run away now, dear. You will come in soon, and help me with the things for the village, will you not?"

And Trottie, left alone again, thought of poor, broken Robert, the full extent of whose fall she did not comprehend. And, thinking of his going to Australia, there came to her mind recollection of the quiet, strong man, with the close-clipped grey beard, whom she had seen in Robert's study, standing before the young politician, and speaking in a language strange to her girlish ears, but in tones which had thrilled her very soul. She thought with pity and regret of Robert's dismissal of this strong, restrained adviser; and she almost loved her recollection of the man who, as "my secretary, Mr. Crawford," had bowed to her with courtly grace on that summer's evening in the big, old house off Pall Mall.

Then she thought, with a look in her soft eyes that was half pity and half aversion, of the dark, handsome artist, with his exquisitely modulated voice, his tones like the deep notes of a 'cello; how with graceful

deference he had told her, on the lawn at The Elms, that he loved her; how, in the course of his declaration, she had found it impossible to check him, because of the faint suggestion underlying his courteous demeanour, if not of banter, then of perfectly self-contained suavity and calmness; how at the end, when she answered him, his voice had broken, and the man had seemed to uncover himself as he said:

"Ah! He who has only been serious once must —must hope never to be serious again."

Then, turning slowly away from the creeper-covered balustrade of the terrace, Trottie walked towards the house; and, as she walked, she said softly to herself: —

"Will, why don't you come back and take it all away? Tell me it is all for the best. I want you, Will. Don't give yourself —all, to —to that Bush!"

CHAPTER XLII

BIRTH

"You shall go straight from this place to the sea; and when you have reached your own world, your story will be written."

The words had throbbed through and through and in and out Will Darley's brain, as he rode from the bark humpy by Warroo Gully, till it seemed to him that they must be written in letters of bright, white flame, all across the heart which, in its modesty, had made him almost afraid to think of what they meant, or whether he could justify them.

There was something about the life-giving influence which, in the little room above Holborn, and in the gunyah at Warroo, had come to him in such a strange, distorted guise; something there was in it which made the words of the old beachcomber sacred in their details, to Will. So, in travelling to Warroo, he had waited for the "blue haze." So, in travelling from Warroo to the sea, he waited for nothing, but journeyed "straight."

It was only when his luggage was aboard the "Guiniviere" — the full-rigged clipper ship in which he had decided to travel, in preference to making the

voyage in a steamer — that Will remembered the Laytons, the Bradfords of Karelah, and his horse at the Woolgrower's Arms in Tamworth. He wrote long, grateful letters to the friends who had been so kind to him in his loneliness; letters which those friends put carefully aside, as correspondence of a kind new to them, and very beautiful. And then Will left the new-old island of the South, where his soul was born, and started on the journey "to his own place," which on this occasion was to occupy three months.

The "Guiniviere" was going by the Horn that voyage, instead of round the more temperate sister cape. As the graceful, yacht-like ship, with her flowing top-sails half-hoisted, and her great white foresail bellying out in the fragrant wind from the South, was towed out through Sydney Heads into the sweeping roll of the Pacific, Will realised that, since saying good-bye to the bushman of Warroo Gully, he had spoken no real word, no sentence beyond the merest amenities of life, to any man or woman.

Will had, since the morning of his riding away from the gunyah in the Bush, been walking, riding, travelling, and performing certain necessary little duties, as sleep-walkers sometimes perform them. He was very happy in an indistinct way; but he was dazed. He felt a strange, new strength in him, a power to achieve, and a belief in the coming achievement, which he had never felt before. And in itself this feeling of strength was the very truest humility. Never had the world

seemed so large, and life so sacred a thing, to Will; and never had he, Will Darley, seemed to himself so small and insignificant.

A thought came into his mind which, put into words, meant: "I can do the thing, and I hope it will be good; but, oh, the pity of it, that I am not a better man to be more worthy of this, and to make it really beautiful. All this is given to me, — I who am so small, — while others who are so much greater, have so little."

And looking at others, — the ship's captain and officers and men about the deck, — there was a benign and loving pity, blended with the humility in his heart, which, shining in his big, thoughtful eyes, as he looked at them, made one sailor say to another, "Bill, we've got a passenger aboard as would take a ship to the North Pole without straining a plate in her. He'd make up for forty Jonahs. It's as good as two tots of rum off the Horn, to look at his face."

There were only two passengers besides Will in the "Guiniviere" that voyage; and as they were more or less invalids, and at first confined to their cabins, Will had, so Captain Graham assured him, "The entire run of the quarter-deck, and sole command of the smoking-room." This smoking-room was a small deck-house on the ship's poop, which had at one time been used for a chart-room, and was lined with square, sliding windows. It was a pleasant room, because it combined the advantages of the open deck's uninterrupted outlook, with the shelter of a saloon. So Will

patronised the smoking-room largely, dividing his time pretty evenly between its occupancy, and the pacing of the weather-side of the poop.

For three days, he wandered about the ship, peering curiously under the dark teak-wood break of the foc'sle head; watching boys making sennit under the sheltered lee of the mid-ships life-boat; gazing in dreamy admiration at the foam which swirled and darted away from the clean sheer of the "Guiniviere's" bow, out into the grey water two hundred yards to leeward; and gradually taking into himself, and adding to the Spirit of the Bush which still permeated him, the atmosphere of these new environments.

Then it occurred to him that he must begin his work, begin the bringing into life of this child of his. So he gathered together pen and ink, and a pile of the "copy" paper he had brought from the little room in Holborn; and with these things he settled down in the poop smoking-room. There he sat thinking, with the paper spread before him and pen in hand, for an hour. During that hour, a half-frightened look crept into his eyes once or twice, but only to quickly give place to the expression of restful strength and modest happiness, which had drawn comment from the foc'sle hand on the day the ship left port.

At the end of an hour, Will suddenly lowered his up-raised hand, and, bending close over his paper, wrote these words: "And the heart of the man was pure white love; the shell of him only being long stained by bitter juices, and hard."

Birth

Then the "Guiniviere" gave a heavy lurch up to windward, and the officer of the watch swore angrily at the man at the wheel. That lurch caught Will's pen at the end of the "d" in "hard," and drew it in a slanting line all across the clean sheet of copy paper, and on to the red cover of the smoking-room table.

"Very well," said Will, quietly, "that shall be the opening then. It is short, but it will do."

He rose then, and, putting away his writing materials, touched them no more that day.

On three successive mornings, Will spread out his paper on the smoking-room table, and for hours stared in perplexity at its clean, white surface. He wrote nothing. Then a great fear began to grow up in his heart, and, spreading to the brain of the man, showed in his big eyes in a look which made laughter-loving Captain Graham constrained and uncomfortable.

"Why, bless me," said the skipper to McGowan, the red-haired, Aberdeenshire first mate; "he looks as though he was carrying a ship-load of ghosts about with him."

The fear which had crept over Will was the contact with actual reality, mechanism, the coming to a point, after a month of feverish inception. What if he could not suckle this child of his? Would the beautiful thing die? When these questions suggested themselves to Will, as he walked on the weather-side of the ship's poop, he would throw his head back like a frightened stag. Then the great sighing bosoms of the "Guiniviere's" canvas seemed to bend lovingly

towards him and to murmur, "Patience." But Will was in fear, in fear that was pain.

There came a morning when the "Guiniviere's" t'gallant-sails and royals were furled, and her decks cleared, not for action but for weather, the weather of the Horn. A steady half gale of wind was on her quarter, and the man at the wheel was very glad of his great woollen mitts that morning, for the "Guiniviere" was far enough south of the Horn to be steering N. N. E. Will sat in the smoking-room, with the sheet of paper before him on which the last words written were: "The shell of him only being long stained by bitter juices, and hard." Then came the broad, uneven line caused by the ship's lurch to windward.

Now, Will bent his head again, and half-way down the sheet he wrote: "That which had brought the bitter juices, and made the shell so hard, was —" He raised his head again at the last word, and looked out through the square windows on the lee side of the smoking-room.

What he saw was the perfect loneliness of a seascape of unbroken grey. One sees such pictures off the Horn, and sometimes, when far enough south, off the Cape of Good Hope. Half a gale is carrying with it a suggestion of freezing sleet. There is no visible horizon. It is merged vaguely in the all-pervading greyness which covers sea and sky, saturates the cold air, and makes all three run in and out, and mingle with each other, mistily. And through it all, a wind

is rushing up from the ice-bound South, with strength enough to send a great ship scudding through the broken sea at a steady fourteen knots, her lee scuppers under water, and the straining tack of the main-sail dipping now and again in the foam under her gunwale, foam which would be snowy white but for the misty light which makes it only one degree less grey than the intermingled sea and sky.

Gazing out at all this, Will saw a little brown bird tumbling and hovering about in mid-greyness, to leeward of the "Guiniviere." There was nothing very strange in the sight, save the fact that two or three days had passed beyond the time at which one expects to see a shore bird near a ship at sea. Yet this little, struggling atom of life affected Will strongly. For one thing, it served to intensify the indescribable lifelessness of that southern ocean outlook, as the presence of isolated life always does. Then again, there was pathos in the fluttering helplessness of the brown bird, and the utter impossibility of any aid reaching it.

Whilst Will looked, the bird seemed to throw its head round in a despairing search for shelter, in the direction in which the wind carried it. It looked, and Will could fancy its smothered piping of distress as the little eyes took in the unending greyness of that sea-scape. The gale from the South gave a little snort of fury; the "Guiniviere" took a flake of boiling foam over her lee rail, and Will, in the smoking-room, drew a quick breath of sympathy, as the brown bird fluttered its wings into its sides, and then, sea and sky mocking

its look of despair, fell, carried slanting-wise by the wind, and was sucked down into the water which tumbled under the ship's lee.

Will, who had risen to his seat, sat quietly down again. And the look of fear had gone from his eyes. Proceeding, without a break, from the point at which he had stopped to look through the square windows to the sea beyond, he began to write, his hand moving gently from side to side of the copy paper, and the characters he wrote being small and even. Gradually, his head sank nearer and nearer to the red tablecloth; his pen touched more sharply the bottom of the ink-pot he used; the letters of the words he wrote were doubled in size, and his hand flew across the paper, with little occasional jerks, at ten lines to the slip.

When at last he suddenly raised his head, and the pen rolled from his fingers onto the deck of the smoking-room, Will knew that the first chapter of his story was written. "That which had brought the bitter juices, and made the shell so hard," had been told; and the child of the artist drew its first breath.

Once, when the "Guiniviere" was well within the southern tropics, Will's hands were idle for more than a week. He had sprained his wrist by a fall in the saloon companion, and could not hold a pen. More than once the growing pile of written sheets was left on the little shelf at the head of Will's bunk, for one, two, and even three days, without any addition being made to it. During those breaks the

beachcomber's son lay dreaming in the sunshine on the forecastle head, or idled the hot day away under the awning on the poop, breathing strength into himself with the salt moisture which rises from a vessel's wake.

He talked very little to any one on the ship; and, during the working periods, he wrote at high pressure, and for long stretches of time. The second steward grew accustomed to the habits of this passenger, who addressed him with as much deference as he, the steward, observed in speaking to the captain. So, when he had sounded the dinner gong, the steward would walk quietly up the saloon companion and look through the open windows of the smoking-room. If he saw Will Darley with head bent low and hand flying across the thin sheets of paper before him, the man would return without a word to the saloon, and, making "Mr. Darley's apologies, sir," to the captain, would place something on one side for Will to eat later on. If, when he looked through the sliding windows, Will was picking up sheets from the deck, or reading from the pile at his side, then the steward would say, "Dinner's waiting, sir," and Will, with a start, would rise and follow him into the saloon.

So the weeks slipped by quickly enough, and the Southern Cross, sinking low in the sky at night, the great North star came into view. Sailors, sitting together on the fore-hatch in the dog-watches, began to talk of "pay day," and of their resolutions to come to sea no more.

The "Guiniviere's" supply of fresh water was

almost exhausted, owing to a leakage in one of her tanks, caused by the shifting of her cargo in the heavy weather she experienced when off the Horn. Will knew nothing of this, however, and was not aware that the vessel was to put in at Teneriffe to have her tanks filled. He had hardly spoken for three days, and the few hours in which he had slept, had been spent on the settee in the smoking-room.

At eight o'clock on a glorious evening in early May, when the twilight of the temperate North had begun to lengthen and beautify the bridge between day and night, Will sat down after a little stroll on deck, to write the chapter before the last in his story.

"I shall finish this to-night," he thought, "and, to-morrow, in the sunshine, I will write the last chapter, and finish the story."

Hour after hour passed whilst Will scribbled over the thin paper, his hand trembling under the nervous strain of those three days of almost uninterrupted work, and the hair which lay on his forehead growing wet and dark. At last he paused, holding the handle of his pen hesitatingly to his lips. An apprentice outside struck two bells. But that could not have been nine o'clock, because the first mate was on deck, and the first mate took the middle watch. Therefore it must have been one o'clock in the morning. But, as Will had not even heard the bell striking, it mattered very little.

Will hesitated for a minute, biting the end of his pen whilst drops of perspiration stood out and glis-

tened on his forehead. Then, pushing aside the little heap of paper which represented that night's work, he began the last chapter of his story. Two hours afterwards, he stopped writing, and leaned back with a pained look in his eyes. Two or three minutes elapsed, and then, bending forward again, he covered two sheets with fine, even writing. As he finished the second sheet, he rose to his feet with a little moan of pain. "No, no, old man! Not that," he said. And there was a sob in his voice.

The officer of the watch, leaning on the poop-rail outside, stepped forward and peered curiously through the windows of the smoking-room. He saw Will, sitting with arms out stretched across the little table, his head lying wearily on the scattered sheets of paper, and his eyes closed. But the officer merely shrugged his shoulders and walked away; for there were soundings to be taken, flags attended to, and sails furled that morning, and he had no time to waste.

Some time afterwards, Will lifted his head from the papers on the red tablecloth, and, picking up the two sheets he had last written, tore them into fragments and threw the fragments on the deck. Then he rose and, stepping across the little room to the open windows on the fore side, he looked out between the leech of the square-cut mizzen-sail and the bulkhead of the smoking-room.

The sky was softly ribbed by stretches of cool purple and grey, and the breath of the early morning's first sweetness, lifting the damp hair from Will Darley's

forehead, soothed and stroked his hot head as a tender woman's hand might have done. All the bewitching half lights of northern sub-tropical morning seemed to shine in that track across the sea, which, beginning narrowly between canvas and teak-wood, widened and grew in beauty in the distance, till it ended in a huge, black shadow, along which Will's tired eyes travelled to the side of the peak of Teneriffe.

There rose the peak in solemn, beautiful majesty. And, as Will gazed, the purple waves in the sky spread slowly over the grey streaks, and lines of gold, glittering underneath, grew and slashed the purple with their morning glory. Then, slowly, a huge bank of mist rolled up the side of the peak, and, falling back on the clouds beyond, laid bare its kingly, snow-clad summit to the first darting brilliancy of the sun's rays.

There came through the open window, in a deep bass voice, a series of notes which sounded like: "Tu-li mon yeh, huli. O-ho! Oho! Tu hoo li, huli, mon yeh! Oho, tuli — " etc.

As these sounds floated into the little room, making the soft air to quiver as they came, the square mizzen-sail became a triangle before Will's eyes; and then, the bunt-lines catching its bellying folds, it rose above the range of vision of the smoking-room window, and showed to Will the little white houses, and the waving greenery, of sun-kissed Teneriffe.

Will, without a word, turned from the beautiful picture of island morning, and from his old seat be-

side the little table, bent over his papers again. His eyes were sparkling with happiness, and the cool fragrance of the morning was upon his face, as his pen flew over those last few sheets. And then, with a great sigh of loving accomplishment, which seemed to surge clear up from heart to lips, he huddled the scattered papers into a heap, and carried them down to his quiet little cabin.

The "Guiniviere" left Teneriffe again that evening; but, before she sailed, there had been sent ashore, with the captain's papers, a telegraphic message which read as follows: —

"Have found it all. Home about 20th. Will."

And the message was addressed to James Cumming's daughter, Charlotte.

CHAPTER XLIII

"WHERE THE HEART LIES LET THE BRAIN LIE ALSO"

THE morning on which the "Guiniviere" was towed up the Thames, was the beginning of the eighty-fifth day of her voyage from Sydney Harbour. When Will had passed through the customs house ordeal, his worldly possessions were piled in picturesque confusion on and in a four-wheeled cab, and he was brought suddenly face to face with the serious, if familiar question, of, "Where to, sir?"

"Well, I can't go straight to The Elms," he muttered; "so — ah, well — drive to the nearest station, Cabby."

So Will was driven to one of the dingy little railway stations which are dotted about London's great dockland, and from there he proceeded to the London that he knew. Undecided as to where he should go, Will finally drove to an hotel, considerably to the westward of Temple Bar, which he had been wont to patronise in the pre-journalistic days of his Oxford vacations.

"Not that this reckless extravagance must be taken as a precedent," he murmured to himself, as a bow-

ing porter opened the entrance doors of the hotel for him; "but one must go somewhere, and, for the sake of the landlord, it is to be hoped that my Holborn establishment is not open for my reception."

Within two hours of this time, Will was on his way down to Teddington. From Sheerness, on the previous evening, he had posted a letter to James Cumming's daughter, in which he had said that he hoped to be able to reach The Elms on the following afternoon. But he had not been able to specify the exact time of his arrival, and so, when he reached the little station, no one was there to meet him.

Trottie, looking, Will thought, more sweet and womanly than ever, was standing at the wicket gate which opened out of the garden of The Elms when her cousin came striding down the lane, sniffing the scent of may-blossom in the hedges as he walked.

"Trottie!"

"Will! I am so glad you have come."

And then they shook hands, as they might have done had Will been an ordinary afternoon caller. Such is the curious simplicity of our language, and of our modes of salutation. Yet Will's heart was beating like a sledge-hammer when he took Trottie's hand in his; and a wave of colour swept over the face of the girl, and by her previous paleness was made the more noticeable. What Will's eyes had looked for eagerly in her face was that which should tell him that its owner was still "Trottie" to him, if "Charlotte" to others. The face had told him this,

or he thought so; and, therefore, he became able to notice other things.

"Trottie, you don't look so well as when I saw you last. You have not been ill, have you?"

Trottie said she was very well; and as they walked together towards the boat-house at the end of the lawn, she asked why Will carried a little bag which suggested legal documents.

"There is something in it I want to show you," he said; and offered no further comment.

Then they stepped into the Fairie, and Will, at his old seat, sculled slowly up-stream, whilst talking to Trottie. The Fairie was not taken far from home that afternoon, however; and when Will, having found a sheltered spot under the willows, had made the boat's painter fast to the stump of a tree, he said:

"You know why I went away from England, Trottie? You know I wanted to see and feel the world outside the small part of it I knew, so that I might make something to add to it."

Trottie bent her head.

"Well, when I telegraphed you from Teneriffe that I had 'found it all,' I meant that I had found the thing I looked for, which would tell me what I should try to make."

"Yes, I knew that, Will," said Trottie, quickly; "and I am very glad. I knew you would; but — but I 'm very glad, Will."

"Thank you, Troddles." There was a little tremor in Will's voice; but that left it as he went on

to say: "I must tell you afterwards if I can, Trottie, how it all came about. But now I want to tell you that, coming home from Australia, I have made this thing which I longed to make. It is my first born, this book; and no one knows of it but you, and one other, and myself. It is me, — this story of mine, — Trottie. It is the best thing I can make; but — it may not be good. I — Trottie, I have brought it here for you to judge. Will you let me read it to you?"

"You know that 's what I should ask, Will," said Trottie, simply. "I did n't know what it would be; but I hoped you would show me what had come to you, — the thing you had found."

So, there under the willows in the creek above Teddington, Will Darley began to read to Trottie the book which opened with the words: "And the heart of the man was pure, white love — "

He paused after the first sentence to explain the circumstances connected with the slanting line across that sheet. And, afterwards, Trottie's eyes grew moist and misty, when he told her of the little brown bird which had been blown to death in the greyness off Cape Horn.

Afternoon tea was a function which that day escaped the memory of James Cumming's daughter; and, but, for the changing light of evening, dinner might have shared the same fate. But Will remembered in time, and recalled to Trottie the day of their little adventure at the weir, after which their late

arrival at The Elms had drawn down upon them the wrath of James Cumming and the mild reproaches of Miss Lipston.

"You will come in to see Father, and have dinner with us, Will?" said Trottie, questioningly.

"No, not now, Trottie. Not now, by and by I hope, but — not yet."

"Well, you will come in the morning and go on the river again? You won't keep the story from me?"

"No, Trottie; I will be here. We will finish the story together. No one else must see it until you have heard it all; because — because it is me, Trottie."

So they parted in the garden at The Elms; and Will journeyed back to town, thinking he would go and see his friend Hinton. Arrived at Waterloo, however, he altered his mind, and walked over Hungerford bridge to the hotel at which he had left his luggage after coming from the docks. He did not want his friend, or any one else, that night; any more than he had wanted friends on his way from Warroo to the sea. Early on the following day, he left directions at the hotel to the effect that his baggage should be stored until his return; and then, taking with him a small portmanteau, as well as the little bag containing the story, he travelled down to Teddington, and engaged a room at an inn in the town.

When he arrived at the garden gate of The Elms, and he reached it before eleven, he could see no sign of Trottie, and so, feeling rather like a trespasser in

doing so, he walked across the lawn and down to the boathouse. Standing by the side of the Fairie, and giving directions to a boy who was arranging the carpet and cushions of the boat, stood Miss Lipston, and, looking on rather disconsolately from a short distance away, was Trottie herself, a parasol tucked under one arm, and a motherless spaniel puppy under the other.

Of course Will was delighted to see his old friend, and said so, wondering, whilst he spoke, whether it would be possible to proceed with the story in the good lady's presence, and deciding finally that it would not.

"Dear me!" said Miss Lipston, smiling kindly at her old favourite; "what an age it is since I last saw you, Will; and what a man of travel you have become since then."

"Yes!" admitted Will, abstractedly, and without knowing in the least what Trottie's one-time governess was talking about. Then, after a few minutes' desultory chat, during which Will began to resign himself to the inevitable, and determined to try and forget the object of his visit for that day, Miss Lipston performed one of the many small acts of kindness of her life, and said: —

"There now, I declare I have left my crochet in the house. I will go and fetch it, and," — turning to Trottie, — "I do not think, after all, I will come on the river to-day, dear. I have a lot of letters and small matters to attend to; so you young people had better not wait for me. I am sure Will will take

great care of you, and you will find plenty of lunch for two in the basket."

So the kind-hearted, fussy little lady kissed Trottie, who had coloured slightly during this speech, and shaking Will's hand, after expressing a hope to see him as a visitor at The Elms before long, hurried away across the lawn to the house.

"Is n't she a dear old thing?" said Trottie, as the Fairie drifted into the stream in response to Will's lazy handling of the sculls.

"She is indeed," he admitted. And, half an hour afterwards, Trottie was listening, with bright, interested eyes, to the reading of Will's story.

So the day came and went, and when another like it had passed, Will reached a point within a few chapters of the end of the book.

"To-morrow we will finish it, Trottie," he said, as they parted on the evening of this third day.

"Yes. We shall finish it; but — oh, Will, I am so happy! Good-night!"

Then came the fourth day, the last day of the story, and a more beautiful one from a weather point of view, than any of those that had preceded it. Will was early at the wicket gate by the side of the lawn, his inn being within a mile of The Elms; and Trottie, fresh and sparkling as the spring morning, was waiting by the side of the Fairie, with more colour in her face than had been there during the past few months. They went a little farther afield that morning, and the Fairie was moored in Sunbury backwater when Will took the

last remaining chapters of the story from out his business-like-looking little bag.

These last few chapters formed the strongest portion of the story; and Will's voice broke, and he paused more than once to cough, and surreptitiously to brush his eyes, before he finished reading. And big tears stood in Trottie's brown eyes, remaining untouched by her, as the sheaf of paper in Will's hand dwindled down to half-a-dozen sheets. Then Will looked up, but without daring to meet Trottie's eyes, and said:

"These last few sheets were written a few hours before I sent you the telegram, and just as we sighted Teneriffe, in the very early morning."

Trottie bent her head without speaking, and happiness shone through the tears glistening in her eyes, as the beauty of these concluding lines was carried straight to her heart by Will's somewhat husky voice. Then came the last line, a sentence of three words. And Will dropped the single sheet from his hot hand onto the heap in the little bag.

It was finished, and Trottie had seen this first-born of his soul, heard the prattling of his child to its end. Both were silent, and Will, gazing at the paper in the little bag, dared not speak or raise his eyes to Trottie's face. He had shown his soul to her, and told his story. What if, hearing, the one had failed to please her? If, seeing, she had missed the finest drawn lines of the other? What if it had no fine drawn lines, and Trottie knew it?

Will waited and shivered. The world, as seen

from the Sunbury backwater, seemed to catch its breath, waiting also. At last Will rose, and, kneeling in the bottom of the boat, leaned towards the cushions in the stern-sheets, where Trottie sat. He could not bear the silence any longer, so he spoke. But he did not raise his eyes to Trottie's face.

"Trottie," he said, speaking at first as though the uttering of words required a physical effort. "You do not say anything, and — I am afraid. That is all, Trottie, — the all which I told you I had found. That is what came to me in Australia; and that is the thing I have made. I feel now that it is a small thing, and poor; and yet it took all of me to make it, and — "

Trottie's lips parted, and, without looking at her, Will felt that she was about to speak. He touched the little hand that lay beside his on the cushion.

"Don't say it, Trottie. Don't say what you think, now; because, though I have shown this thing to you, I have not told you all that has come to me. Perhaps one will seem no better than the other to you; but — but, I must tell you."

His fingers had closed now over the small, brown hand, and though his head was still bent humbly, and his eyes looked down, yet his voice grew richer and stronger as he said: —

"When I went away, I asked you if you would always be Trottie to me, and I thought of my dear little sister, who had always been so true and loyal;

such a loving little sister in shadows and in sunlight. After I had gone, Trottie, I did not think of you any more as my sister."

The hand under Will's fingers gave a little shiver.

"When I was in the towns and full of sadness and disappointment, I told myself that Trottie would be sorry for my sake. And I went on and on, because I thought, 'You have found nothing to show to Trottie. There is nothing yet that you can make for Trottie.' There were months, Trottie, oh, such weary months, in the small towns of one colony. And then I went to another, and to a beautiful place which I thought was the Bush. It was, a small piece of the Bush. Then I said: 'This is tender and beautiful, very sweet and fragrant. I can give this to beautiful Trottie.' And I was happy. Then I went on and found the Bush itself, and — and all that made the story. And that seemed to become me. That was what had come to me — all that I had looked for. And I said: 'This is what I am to offer to beautiful Trottie. This is what I will pray her on my knees to take and hold; for it is me, and — I love her. I love Trottie!' Then I came away, and, coming, made this thing I have shown you, for an offering to lay at your feet with myself. It is the best thing I could make, though now — I am ashamed. It seems so poor a thing to be the soul of me, when — Trottie! Beautiful Trottie, I love you! My Queen of all the earth, I — love you!"

Will had raised his eyes at last; and with head

thrown back and hands outstretched, he seemed to combine the fire of a man's love and passion, with the reverent humility of a religious devotee, laying all he possessed in the world as an offering at the feet of his deity. Trottie's eyes had been full of tears when Will read the last lines of his story. Now, the tears were trickling slowly down her cheeks, and falling like pearls through a ray of sunlight onto Will's hot hands.

"Trottie, dear, will you take this love which is all — all of me?"

Will's voice was hushed, and fell almost to a whisper.

"Angel Trottie! Can you — love me? Will you be my wife? Trottie!"

"Will, I do love you, and I love your story, because it is you. And — I think I loved you when you first came home. But, Will, I am not half good enough for —"

"Trottie!"

And when the shadows had lengthened almost into evening, they woke suddenly to realities, and Will, casting adrift the painter from a willow to which it had been made fast, began to pull down stream. It was late when they reached the lawn of The Elms, and Trottie knew James Cumming would be fuming. Yet, dutiful daughter as she was, and — so Will gravely affirmed — "The dearest Trottie in the world," yet she smiled at Will's apologies for having made her late, and, as she bid him good-night by the wicket-gate, she said: —

"The lunch-basket is all ready packed for to-morrow, Will. It was good of you to keep it so carefully to-day. Good-night!"

And before Will realised that he had kept Trottie on the river from early morning till late evening, without refreshment, she had vanished from his sight behind the elm clump. So he walked off down the sweet-scented lane, murmuring love and music to the hedges as he went.

Part VII

CHAPTER XLIV

"OUR PARENTS OF OLD ENTAILED THE CURSE"

Two grooms are kept at the Coach and Horses, in Narrabri, N. S. W. The Coach and Horses was always looked upon as the sportsman's hotel, *par excellence*, of Narrabri, till they built big, red-brick, cedar-and-brass-fitted "Tattersall's." And even now, most of the old hands who remember the days when the colony's great race-course was at Parramatta prefer to take their "Scotch" and "Long Colonials" at the one storey house. There is often a roustabout, or an industriously inclined swagman, employed for a week or so at the Coach and Horses; when the Quarter Sessions sit, for instance, or during Show week. But, as a regular thing, there are two grooms, and until old Jessop died, and the house began to decay, there were three.

These two grooms were sitting together one night, when the autumn race meetings were over, in the old weather-board saddle-room behind the stables, talking pig-skin.

"Our Parents of Old Entailed the Curse"

"Did you see the chap I let a horse to this morning, Mick?" said Joe Lynch, the elder man, the skin of whose face was like the dried shell of passion-fruit.

"No, I did n't," replied Mick. "What about him?"

"Oh, nothing particular, only he was about as queer a fish as I ever let a prad to, that 's all. And, my oath, but he had the neatest style of stowing tanglefoot of any man I 've seen, unless Jim Maroney. You remember Jim Maroney, don't you? — the boundary rider out Narella way. Don't you remember, I sat on his inquest; and we called it 'accidental,' because his wife was there."

Mick was cutting patterns with his clasp-knife in the dust on the floor of the old saddle-room; but he nodded at a venture, and "b'leeved he did remember something about it."

"Well," continued Joe Lynch, "this new chum to-day, — I knew he was a new chum the moment I set eyes on his boots, and his little straw hat, — he was just like Jim used to be with his whiskey. Took it like a man might take a long beer, an' — Well, he 'd had more 'n a few when he came out to me. Lord, he was like a shearer the day after his cheque 's done, only he looked as if his bloomin' cheque had been running on for a twelvemonth. I would n't 've let him a moke at all, only, when I asked the old woman, she says: 'What d' ye think I feed th' horses for? It 's got nothing to do with you if a gentleman's hand 's a bit shaky. His money 's all right, I don't mind tell-

ing you, and' — Oh, she got her wool off, I can tell you. 'All right,' says I, 'it's no odds to me if he can't stand, only don't blame me if your horse gets run in with a brumby mob.' So I gave him the chestnut mare, since the old woman was so high and mighty; and if she don't come back with an empty saddle to-night, I shall reckon they've both broken their necks, for I believe that chap would fall off a bullock-waggon between this an' Wydah."

"What was his name, Joe?" said Mick, indifferently.

"I don't know; the old woman's got his name; but he was all right as far as that goes. It appears he'd come all the way out from England to see old Crawford — You know old Crawford, don't you, of Warroo Gully? He's another tidy hand with his liquor, is old Crawford of Warroo —"

"Hullo, there! My Ker-lonial, Mick! Here's that wall-eyed carrion of a chestnut comin' down the yard."

. . . . . .

When the Narrabri coach pulled up at the Wydah hotel that evening, there were two passengers aboard for the little township, and they were both "insides." One of the passengers was lying on a pile of mail-bags, and the other was sitting beside him, supporting the recumbent man's head with one arm. The man lying down was Robert Darley, and the other was James Carberry, the general store-keeper of Wydah, who had been in Narrabri all day, on business.

"Our Parents of Old Entailed the Curse"

"Steady, Mick! Steady with his head," said Carberry to the landlord of the Wydah hotel, as together they lifted the prostrate man out of the coach, and carried him gently into the little sitting-room behind the bar, — the same little room in which, not many months before, Mary, the publican's daughter, had watched Will Darley trifling with good corned beef and carrots.

"Bad case, this," said the landlord, looking at the blurred, white face of the insensible man, with its mat of fair hair, made dark and plastered over one temple. "Somebody'd better ride to Narrabri for a doctor; an', I reckon, we might wash his head, Jim, eh? What do you think?"

"Yes, we might do that," said the store-keeper; "but it's all right about the doctor. We met Ned Fisher on the road out, an' I reckon Dr. Machattie ought to be started by this. Ned was on that big roan of his."

"Who is he?" asked the landlord, when Mary had brought a big basin of warm water into the room where the wounded man lay. "Looks more like a Melbourne side native or a new chum, does n't he? He 's not a Narrabri man, anyhow."

"No," said Carberry. "Barney, the coachman, says an Englishman, fresh out from Home, came to Narrabri this morning, and hired a horse to ride out here. He was going to see old Crawford of Warroo Gully, and this must be the man, because there was an envelope sticking out of his pocket when he found him,

with Crawford's name on it. And I reckon, if anyone wants to do him a good turn, they'd better ride out to Warroo, an' bring old Crawford in to-night."

The landlord reflected a moment, and then said: "Yes. You look after him, Jim, and I 'll go and see which of th' boys is in th' bar."

By that time the whole township had heard of the arrival of the wounded man; and when Kenna stepped into the little bar-room, he found all "the boys" of Wydah there, discussing the situation.

"Here, Mick!" said one man, "just pass out a bottle before you clear out again. Is it true the man's head 's broken?"

"He don't belong this way, does he?"

"Was he drunk, Mick, or did the horse throw him?"

"Has any one gone for a doctor?"

The landlord took no notice of the questions fired at him, but quietly placed a bottle of whiskey on the bar-counter and said: —

"The man was going to see old Crawford of Warroo Gully; but if he sees him anywhere, I reckon it 'll have to be here. So I thought p'raps one of you boys —"

"Right, Mick. You look after the man!"

Four of "the boys" were out and across the verandah before the landlord could finish his sentence; and, inside of ten minutes, three of them were galloping recklessly along the road to Warroo, as fast as

their grass-fed ponies could carry them. Old Crawford was looked upon in that district as a white man.

"H'mph! Would have been D. T. in another twenty-four hours," muttered the doctor from Narrabri, as, half an hour later, he bent over the sofa in the little sitting-room where Robert Darley lay. "I think we can save his life though; but I would n't like to answer for the brain. That must have been a terrible kick the brute gave him. Mick! Let 's have another light here, will you? So, thanks! There on the window-sill will do."

And so the doctor, more accustomed to treating cases of this kind than fevers or natural illnesses, proceeded with his task of bringing the broken man back to life. Robert Darley regained consciousness shortly afterwards, and, to the doctor's astonishment, his first words, spoken in a hoarse, gasping voice, were: —

"Curse the brute! I — I might have known it. Give me — Give me some whiskey!"

"Well, this is a sweet subject," muttered the doctor. "But his brain is all right." Then, raising his voice, he added: "Never mind about the whiskey, my man. You lie quiet and thank your stars you 're breathing. You 've been very nearly killed by this fall."

"Damn the fall!" gasped the white-lipped man, whose head was swathed in bandages. "Can't you give me some whiskey — something to stop this — burning — Ah!"

His voice died down to a rasping whimper, and the doctor seated himself beside the couch to try and soothe the man in his agony. Later on, Mick Kenna entered the room on tip-toe, and told the doctor that old Crawford of Warroo Gully was waiting in the bar, to see the man whom they had ascertained had travelled from England to visit him.

"Well, he 'll have to wait," said the doctor, sharply. "This man cannot see any one just yet."

So the worthy landlord returned to his bar, and the doctor resumed his efforts to quieten the patient whose burning head and racking pains made him groan and gasp for very anguish. Still he craved for spirits, and the doctor's mildly sedative draughts seemed to have no effect upon him. At last, willing to adopt any means of distracting the patient's thoughts from his longing for stimulant, the doctor stepped quietly to the door opening into the bar-room, and said to Kenna:

"Send your man in, Mick; he may help me a bit."

Then the man from the gunyah, leaving his broad-brimmed hat on the bar-counter, and so exposing the ragged mane of hair which reached almost to his shoulders, was admitted to the sick-room, and stepped softly up to the couch where the wounded stranger lay groaning.

He could see very little of the patient's face, so much of it was shaded and covered by the bandages on his head; but as Crawford, standing by the side of the roughly extemporised bed, leaned slightly forward, the sick man suddenly started almost into a sitting

posture, and then, falling back with a groan, said hoarsely: —

"Great God! Crossland — Secretary — My — father!"

Then the beachcomber recognised his son, and dropped on one knee by the side of the couch, his grey hair brushing the rug on which his son's elbow rested, as he bowed his head in pitying, sorrowing shame. Outside in the bar he had been told of the doctor's first remark on examining this patient, — this man who had come from England to see him, old Crawford.

Robert Darley was insensible once more; and the beachcomber had to move to one side to allow the doctor to attend his patient. When Dr. Machattie raised his head from beside the sick man's pillow, the look on his face was a very grave one. Turning to the grey-haired man beside him, he said: —

"I am afraid you had better not remain here now, Mr. Crawford. Your— He will regain consciousness directly; but I had rather you were not here. Will you wait in the bar?"

So old Crawford walked, with bent head and drooping shoulders, out into the bar again.

"How is he, Crawford?" asked several voices at once. And one man added: "Was it the horse's kick laid him out so, or what?"

"No," said the man from Warroo, and so hollow was his voice that it caused to fall upon the room a hush which could be felt. "The black streak has risen to his throat, and it's choking him."

And Crawford went out and sat in the shadow on the verandah; whilst the men in the bar wondered what he might mean.

On the next afternoon, when two of these men were sitting together on the post-and-rail fence outside the hotel, one said to the other: —

"There 'll be an inquest I reckon!"

"Likely," said the other man, "I saw the sergeant up here just now."

"Do you know what they tell me he said when he was raving?"

"No. What?"

"They tell me, he said a man's father was bound to support him, and he 'd come to Australia to make his father keep him."

"Lord! Where 's old Crawford now?"

"Mick tells me he went out to the gully again this morning."

"Snakes! Come and have a liquor?"

"Well, I don't care if I do."

CHAPTER XLV

THE WORLD AND WILL DARLEY

WILL DARLEY'S art had blended with his manhood, and he was very happy. A great poet tells of he who, "Once and only once and for one only," fain would "put to proof art alien to the artist's. . . . Gain the man's joy, miss the artist's sorrow." This latter, Will had done without putting to proof art alien to his own, because of the beautiful blending in their inception of his old heart and his new mind. And that which in some women will shut out from soul and heart the artist, was not an attribute of James Cumming's daughter.

Will met Trottie on the day after that which he had made a banian or lunchless day for her, but only to announce the end of his little holiday.

"I must go back to town now, Trottie mine. Not I hope to Fleet Street for any length of time; but the child must be launched upon its career you know; the story must interview a publisher, and I must work. I must work to bring you closer to me, Heartsease. Nothing has been done, and there is so much to do. I hate letting my heart's offering go; but it must be, Trottie. These are the only ways in

which one may give any added things to the world; and — and now there is another motive. If the world likes my offering, it will show its gratitude by giving me, in return, many things I want to give to you. And now, I have begun to hope that some in the world may like it, that it may have beauty, and be worth the world's acceptance — because you like it, my beautiful Trottie."

Trottie smiled happily. "I 'm certain they will like it, Will. Oh, it is so beautiful, they must like it! But not because I do. Will, you must n't think such things of me. I am only an ignorant girl, and — it is sweet to hear you say these things, but I do not want you to love some one who is not me. I love your story because it is you, and — it is so beautiful; but I am a foolish girl, and I know very little. Will, I am only Troddles, and not half worthy of you."

"Trottie, dear! Dear little Trottie, don't make me love you any more, now, or I sha'n't be able to go away. And I must. You are my little girl, because — because God is kind, and you are wonderfully generous. But when you say you are not worthy — Oh, Trottie, you hurt; because I am only a man, and you are as high above me as heaven is above the earth. And yet, you are my little girl, and — I love you. Good-bye, dear! I shall see you before long, and bring you good news, I hope."

So Will went to London, and drove towards the land of law, literature, and journalism, where Hinton lived. He caught his friend in the act of tacking a

notice on the outer door of his chambers, to the effect that he would be "back in twenty minutes," and wished written messages to be "dropped in the box." Their first greetings over, Will asked where his friend might be going during the twenty minutes referred to.

"Well, I' ve been out of sorts all the week," said the journalist, "and I was going to run down to my sister's place in Kent for the day, and pull myself together a bit. You knew I was editing the 'Planet,' did you not? No, by Jove! How could you, though? I am — got the post last February, after an awful flare up with the 'Herald' people. But look here, my sister did n't know I was coming. As long as I am in the open air, one place will be as good as another to me, and I should like to have a yarn with you. Let us go — let me see, where can we go? There 's Rotherhithe, and Hampstead of the happy Heath. But, I say, where are you living?"

"Nowhere, so far," replied Will, promptly, lest another question should follow before this could be answered.

"Oh, then that is one cross less to bear, one burden taken from me. The man who was sharing my flat has developed suicidal tendencies. Got married last week; and — you know my ultra-sensitiveness — a man might have taken his place who swore, or stayed out late at night. However, I should say, the first thing to be done is to get your luggage round here. I say 'round' here, because the staircase has spiral tendencies — place being originally intended as

a home for sufferers from the liquor habit. You have n't any pet crocodiles, or tame bunyips, or anything from furrin' parts, with you, I suppose? Else I was going to tell you there's a man downstairs who plays a flute. We might send him any little things like that. However, regarding our policy in the matter of this luggage. Come on; I suppose it 's somewhere cabbable? We 'll fetch the properties, and then discuss the plot's development."

So Will's friend, one of the hardest-worked and most hard-working journalists in London, babbled on; he being in a good deal of pain at the time from recently developed dyspepsia. The luggage was conveyed from the West End hotel to Hinton's chambers, which, for the time, Will decided to share. And then, dismissing Rotherhithe and Hampstead as joys unattainable under existing circumstances, the two sat down in the journalist's working den, to talk.

That they should come round to the story was of course inevitable; and, hearing of its completion, Hinton promptly insisted on the manuscript being placed before him. Hinton's sub-editorial training had been perfect of its kind. Regarding this first-born of Will's as "copy" pure and simple, he nibbled at chapter ends here, tasted odd paragraphs in different places, and, to use his own rather butcherly phrase, "had a sampling cut in at it all."

This lasted for two hours, Will growing hotter and hotter as time went on, and occasionally reading little extracts in half fearing, half triumphant modesty;

whilst his friend noted lengths of paragraphs and chapters, and various other mechanical details. At last, Hinton threw himself back in a hammock-chair, and, lighting a cigar as he spoke, said : —

" Now, Mr. Darley, if it would n't be too much of an effort, I should be obliged if you would read to me the first and last chapters of your book ; for, behold, the time approacheth when man must take tea and toast, or, failing the toast, then at least tea."

Will read the two chapters as desired, his eyes glistening and his face alive with enthusiasm.

" Thank you ! " said the journalist. And then, without a word further, he turned to the little methylated spirits apparatus which stood on a table in one corner of the room, and proceeded to make tea for himself and his friend. Hinton was a power in the journalistic world then ; but his tea, so far as eatables were concerned, consisted of one milk-biscuit, three parts of which were devoured by the fox-terrier that lay at his feet. Then pipes were filled and lighted, and Hinton said : —

" Look here, Will. What do you think of this story that has grown out of your trip to Australia ? Are you satisfied with it yourself ? "

" Satisfied ! " repeated Will. " No ! I wish it were a lot better, of course ; but I want to hear what you think of it."

" Well ! Now don't throw anything at me," said Hinton ; " I think it quite the best story I have seen these two year. That is what I think after dipping into

it. My opinion is, that, after reading it, I should say it was one of the best stories I had ever seen."

Will gave a great sigh of relief; for he knew his friend's judgment was valued by men whose opinions are supposed to influence the public.

"Then you think a publisher will accept it?"

"Accept it! My dear fellow! Well, look here, I'm not going to enthuse. My liver won't stand it. But I have some little knowledge of Ronald Farley and Company — You would trust your book to Ronald Farley, I suppose? — and, let me see, this is May. H'm — a pity! I tell you what. One can but compromise when unable to meet one's debts. I 'll bet you a new Lincoln and Bennett that this book shall be issued with Farley's end-of-summer batch. It can't be done before; but it will be done then, or I — well, I simply lose a hat. Man can no more."

All this was distinctly pleasing to Will. Though he knew that he would never regain the old close contact with his friend which had characterised their Oxford confidences, yet he felt far more in touch with the masterful, active-minded journalist, at the end of this day, than he had felt during the phase of their friendship which had ended with his departure from Fleet Street.

"This is a critical moment for you as an author," said Hinton, when they went out to dine together, after Will's manuscript had been restored to its old resting-place for one more night. "Your first effort is all right. It is accomplished and good. But the

second effort is the ordeal. The question is now, whether you will be a workman, and turn out big things, or a dilettante and — frivvle. Take my advice, and write — write hard this month. Yours is a great prospect, Darley, a fine prospect; and, after success in journalism, I can't think of anything I would put before it."

Where Hinton was of real assistance at this period, was in the influence of his introductions as the editor of a prominent daily paper. He secured the prompt reading of Will's story by Ronald Farley and Company, with the result that, within eight days of their receiving it, that well-known firm offered the young author very fair terms for the publication of his book.

Somewhat to the surprise of Leonard Hinton, the book appeared as early as the last day of June. The book was published, and the first-born child of Will's blended love and art lay waiting for the world's appreciation.

Then followed a happily brief, but very nervous and anxious time for the young author.

Waking up to find one's self famous has ceased to be a feature of life in England's great centres at all events; and this was not the fate which awaited Will Darley after the publication of his story. What did happen, however, was this: "The Pantheon," which, as all the world knows, never makes a feature in its columns of current fiction, "The Pantheon" came out with a two-column review of the story Will had

begun to write when off Cape Horn in the "Guiniviere." "The Pantheon" did not gush; but it said that Mr. Darley's book was undoubtedly, up to that time, *the* work of fiction of the year.

Then the press generally began to take up this book, which was so unlike the average novel in its subject and its treatment. In less than a month, nearly every paper in the kingdom had devoted some of its space to Will's book; and though the comments passed upon it by men and journals varied to a striking extent, yet there were few readers of fiction who did not buy the book, and fewer still who did not read it.

Amongst the number affected by the very unusual history of the story, James Cumming was induced by the influence of his morning paper to marvel greatly about it. Laying down his "Times" with a sigh, one morning, he said to Miss Lipston: —

"There seems to be really no end to the tributes paid to this first bid for success made by young Darley."

On the same day, he received a special presentation copy of the book from its author; and, the world's approval being James Cumming's one criterion of success, he was doubtless influenced by all this in his reception of Will Darley, when, by appointment, the latter visited him at the end of that week.

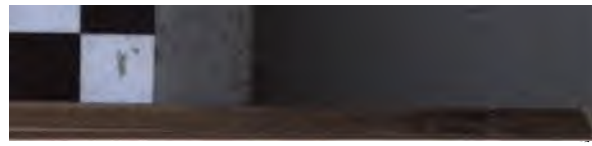
The narrow man of conventions was ready to bow deferentially to success, so that success could show the hall-mark of public acknowledgment. He

paused a little doubtingly when he heard what Will had to ask; but Trottie, appearing in his study at the right moment, gave added weight to Will's eloquence, and to the influence of the morning papers. And, finally, in the same room in which, a few years before, he had coldly parted with this son of his adoption who would steer his own craft of life in his own way,—in that room, he now welcomed, as his legal son and his daughter's husband by betrothal, the man upon whom the world had so suddenly set its stamp of assured success.

On the first day of July, Will had sent to Arthur Crawford of Wydah, in New South Wales, a cable message containing the one word "Published." On the evening of this day which had begun with an interview in James Cumming's study, and ended with a long afternoon's sunshine on the river with Trottie, Will Darley, remembering his promise made by the side of Warroo Gully in the early days of that year, despatched another message to the old beachcomber who had witnessed the birth of his artist's soul.

And this message read as follows:—

"Wedding day first September—Story in third edition—Will Darley."



CHAPTER XLVI

THE BUSH AND THE BEACHCOMBER

I spoke as I saw,
I report as a man may on God's work — *all's love, yet all's law.*

ROBERT BROWNING.

Princes, and ye whom pleasure quickeneth,
Heed well this rhyme before your pleasure tire;
For life is sweet, but after life is death.
This is the end of every man's desire.

SWINBURNE.

THE moonlight away down South is very beautiful; but, during the short winter, it is often broken and fitful.

August is late winter in New South Wales; and, the days being short, old Crawford of Warroo Gully returned early in the evening to his humpy, from the Bush beyond the clear patch.

On a certain evening in the first week of August, he had returned early. Yet at eight o'clock he still sat on the side of his bunk in the gunyah. The old iron lantern had no candle in it, so the inside of the gunyah was quite dark. Outside, the fire had died down to a little heap of smouldering, ash-covered

embers; but old Crawford's evening meal had not been prepared, and the billy-can on the fallen log was empty. And Satan seemed no more in want of food than did his master.

The black outline of the dog's body was visible, stretched on the grass before the humpy, to old Crawford, who sat inside on the edge of his bunk. Every now and again there came a little break in the driving clouds overhead, which allowed the light of a pale winter's moon to fall in jagged patches on the trees in the gully, and on the ground round about the gunyah.

Old Crawford's attitude was somewhat peculiar. He had been sitting with one elbow resting on each knee, and one hand occupied in holding a thin sheet of paper close to his eyes, that he might read the few words written on it. That had been when he first entered the humpy, and before the last rays of daylight had left the sky. Now, the hand that held the paper had slid straight forward in the darkness towards the ground, so that the beard of the bushman, who was still gazing at the paper near the ground, lay across his extended arm and over one knee.

The written words on the paper were, "My wedding day, first September — Story in third edition — Will Darley."

At last the man lifted his head, and, rising from the side of his bunk, rummaged on the shelf above it for a candle. Having found and lighted a candle, he placed it in the iron lantern; and then, taking a sheet of paper from a box on the little shelf, he sat down

again, holding the second sheet before him and in front of the cable message from Will Darley.

When he had apparently perused the contents of this second sheet, he slid the other before it, and read that again. Finally, his elbows still resting on his knees, his two hands dropped between his legs, each holding one of the two sheets. The second sheet was the duly attested copy of a death certificate which described the death of "one Robert Manton Darley, in the parish of Wydah, in the colony of New South Wales," as being the effect of a wound in the head, "caused, apparently, by the kick of a horse."

"The two halves!" muttered the beachcomber, as the sheets of paper rustled, one against the other, between his legs. "Robert, drunk, dead, choked, and broken! He was not prime minister, after all. Poor devil — eh? Poor Robert! He must have been the black streak without the strength. He was not even a white man, Robert. And Will — it's strange I did n't see it — Will must be the strength without the black streak. Will is a white man, and — there 's something more. I wonder where he got that from. That must have come. And, Mary! Mary! Can you hear me? He has got your purity — your spotless purity. You are glad the black streak did not come in both, are n't you, Mary?"

Old Crawford sat there on his bunk, holding the two papers, for a long while, pondering over the picture of his own stained nature thus divided. The

clarified half, with the purity of his dead wife, and something else apart from either, as represented by the cable message from Will; and the half containing the black streak, without the whiteness of the beachcomber, or the prostituted strength and brilliancy of the ex-soldier-diplomat, as briefly summed up in the certificate of the death of poisoned, broken Robert.

Suddenly, the grey-headed man rose, and, taking down a bridle which hung beside his bunk, walked out into the clear patch and down the side of the little gully. He returned presently, leading his horse, and walking slowly. He saddled the horse, and then, leaving it standing, with neck outstretched and hanging bridle, by the side of the fallen log, he stepped quietly forward to where the black dog lay.

He stood looking at the animal for a moment, as a little broken ray of moonlight fell across its hind-quarters. Then, reaching forward, he swathed Satan's body in one of the rugs from his bunk. Then, staggering under the weight of the great dog, he lifted it shoulder high, and laid it across the saddle of his horse, so that its fore-legs hung on one side and its hind-legs on the other.

"Come on, horse!"

Taking the animal's bridle in one hand, whilst resting the other upon Satan's neck, old Crawford led his horse slowly across the clear patch to where the line of heavy timber formed a black wall against the sky. He stopped at the foot of a giant black-butt-

tree, where the moonlight showed a spade sticking in a mound of newly turned earth by the side of a wide hole in the ground.

The bushman again staggered slightly as he lifted Satan from the horse's back, and, twisting the corners of the rug in his two hands, lowered the dog's heavy body into the hole at the foot of the black-butt. Then he began to fill up the hole from the mound of earth by its side.

After throwing in two spadefuls of mould, he paused, resting one arm on the handle of the spade. The old horse, standing two or three yards away, gazed curiously at him.

"Poor old Satan!" he said, staring at the hole in the ground. "You 're dead, like Robert; only you were white, for all your black hide."

Old Crawford knelt down by the side of the hole, and, reaching into it till his shoulder brushed the ground, he touched with his finger-tips the head of the dead kangaroo dog.

"Satan, you fool dog! Oh, Satan, you might have waited! I loved you, fool dog; and — I think you were the Spirit of the Bush to me. Now — there is only the black streak."

The bushman rose after a minute or two; and then, as he plunged his spade into the heap of earth again, and began rapidly to fill up the grave of the black dog, he laughed aloud, and his laugh echoed back to him from the Warroo Hills, as he shouted: —

The Bush and the Beachcomber

"*Courage, camarade, le diable est mort!* Satan is dead, and the beachcomber still lives. Long live the beachcomber!"

When the hole was filled, old Crawford flung his spade to one side, and, hardly waiting to throw the hanging bridle over its head, swung himself onto the old horse's back. He had no whip. So, snatching the broad-brimmed hat from his head, he brought that down with all his strength on the animal's flank, and, with reins hanging and heels pressed to the horse's sides, the bushman started off at a hand-gallop through the heavy timber to the clear patch where the gunyah stood.

The wind had risen, and was drawing melancholy sounds from all the trees in the little gully, as Crawford reined in his horse beside the fallen log. The light of the moon only glimmered very faintly, and at intervals, now, through the edges of the dark clouds that drove across it. And the Bush was dreary and sombre-looking when the old man dismounted.

As he entered the gunyah, a gust of cold air struck his face, and made the matted hair on his forehead rise and fall. The wind had blown a sheet of bark down from one side of the humpy, and left an open space through which a few drops of rain began to fall.

"What, old humpy, are you going too? Can't you wait a little while?"

Then, standing with one hand resting on the ridge-pole of the gunyah, the old man began to think again of the two halves of his nature which his sons repre-

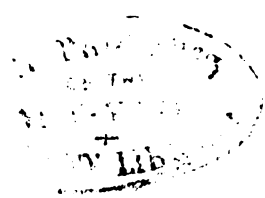
sented, — the dead, black half, and the strong, living, white half.

"And Robert is dead!" he muttered. "Dead, with the black streak all through him. And Will is white, and strong — He will be famous. And Satan — whiter than all the rest — Satan is dead, with my Bush."

He paused, and a dingo, slinking along under the Warroo Hills, howled twice in quick succession, and was answered by the cackle of a jackass from a tree near the gunyah.

The beachcomber smiled as the melancholy notes with their mocking echo reached his ears. Bringing his shaking hand down slowly from the ridge-pole to the neck of a bottle which stood on the shelf over his bunk, he said: —

"And I! That's queer, too — I am — nothing!"



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